

Lindsay superjail inmate population dwindling due to COVID-19 measures

Todd Vandonk

There are 200 fewer inmates currently housed in Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay (CECC) due to COVID-19 measures.

Ministry of Solicitor General spokesperson Kristy Denette said the province anticipates the number of inmates in custody will continue to decrease over the next few weeks as additional steps are implemented to prevent the spread of the virus.

“Our goal is to lower the number of inmates in custody while preserving public safety,” Denette explained in an email statement to Mykawartha.com.

The Lindsay superjail usually houses just over 1,000 inmates. As of Monday (March 30), the population at CECC sat at 834 inmates.

“Due to our proactive work to address overcrowding in our institutions, all provincial correctional institutions are currently within operational capacity,” Denette added.

Inmates at the provincial jail are either serving sentences of two years less a day or are on remand, awaiting bail or resolution via a guilty plea or trial.

According to the Ministry of the Attorney General MAG, currently remand inmates account for 50 per cent of the population at the Lindsay jail. Sentenced inmates account for 43 per cent of inmates.

The decrease in inmates is the result of the MAG's mandate [to release accused people – when possible – on bail prior to entering the correctional system](#).

Earlier this week, MAG spokesperson Brian Gray told Mykawartha.com that the decision to grant or deny bail is complex and based on the specific circumstances of each case.

“The Crown will make recommendations on bail in consideration of the liberty interests of the accused and the Charter right to reasonable bail balanced against societal interests in public safety and confidence in the administration of justice,” he said in an email statement.

“The protection and safety of the public is always a paramount concern and we continue to monitor the evolving situation on COVID-19,” Gray added.

Denette said that the Ministry of Solicitor General is currently in the process of reviewing all inmates to determine their eligibility for early release. Inmates chosen must be near the end of their sentences, be considered a low risk to reoffend and not convicted of a serious crimes.

“Unlike the standard process, inmates are not required to apply for release, and will

be notified if they qualify and must agree to the terms and conditions of their release prior to leaving the institution,” she noted.

Inside the jail, CECC Local 368 Union president Sean Dunn said staff are getting by, but are worried about the potential spread of COVID-19 within the walls of the facility.

“The biggest fear for staff is taking it home to their kids or family members in general,” he mentioned.

Dunn compared the jail to a nursing home, noting that a high number of inmates have compromised immune systems.

“If it gets in here, it will go rampant,” he said.

“But our nursing department has been absolutely phenomenal as far monitoring and testing.”

He also applauded the Ministry of Solicitor General's efforts to try and keep staff and inmates safe from the deadly virus. Dunn said inmates are screened when they arrive at the jail, and staff are equipped with hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment, if needed.

“They (the ministry) have been great to us and have tried to keep us as educated on this as they can,” he mentioned.

However, he does want to see temperature screening for staff.

“We are pushing towards getting staff to have their temperature taken,” he noted.