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### Criminal Law

## New jail hires a positive step forward



THE CANADIAN PRESS



TORONTO – Ontario is hiring more corrections staff, including officers, nurses, psychologists and segregation managers in an attempt to address issues with solitary confinement and inmates with mental-health challenges.

The dedicated segregation managers will work at institutions with higher segregation rates to try to reduce the use of isolation and help inmates who have been in solitary transition back to the general population.

In total the province is hiring 239 staff for its 26 adult correctional facilities, including 24 correctional officers, which are in addition to a previous commitment to hire 2,000 officers over the next three years.

The hires also include correctional supervisors, nurses, mental-health nurses, psychologists, recreational staff, chaplains, librarians and administrators.

To support inmates with mental-health issues, the province is also looking to hire release-from-custody workers to help offenders reintegrate into the community and mental-health court support workers.

Ontario will fund pilot programs in Toronto and Hamilton to provide specialty psychiatric beds for inmates whose mental-health needs are too complex for general hospitals.

In an interview with [AdvocateDaily.com](#), Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#) describes the initiatives as a positive step in the right direction, especially the new hires of nurses, psychologists, recreation staff and librarians.

“Obviously these employees are only beneficial if the inmates are actually allowed access to the services they provide,” she says. “As it stands, in certain facilities, inmates are not even allowed books, let alone access to a complete library.”

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In terms of the increased staff for segregation units, Goldlist says this seems confusing, given the government's recent announcement of reform around the use of segregation and that it should only be used as a measure of last resort.

“If the mandate is to decrease inmate stays in segregation, I would think the additional staff in these areas unnecessary,” she tells the online legal news service. “That said, I think helping inmates transition back to the general population, especially after lengthy stays in isolation, may ensure their behaviour is more amenable to life on the ranges or dorms.”

Goldlist, principal of [JHG Criminal Law](#), is happy to hear of the increased support and alternative arrangements being contemplated for inmates with mental health issues.

“That is definitely one segment of the inmate population that is worst served by the current system,” she says. “Inmates with psychiatric issues cannot handle life in custody and being confined often exacerbates their troubles. The result is that the jails throw them into segregation, where their disposition further deteriorates. It’s a vicious cycle and I hope the province follows through in their suggestions for reintegration and psychiatric programs.

“Perhaps one day we will see better reintegration programs for all inmates released from remand centres. People lose their home, their money, their job, their place in counseling programs while in custody and after completing their sentence, they are sent back out to nothing but a probation officer who expects they follow the law and comply with the rules. How can they possibly do that with so many doors closed to them in a system designed to keep them stuck?”

– With files from [AdvocateDaily.com](#)

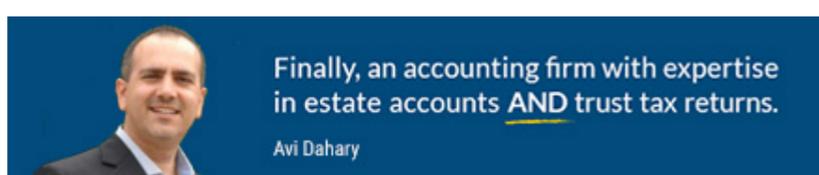
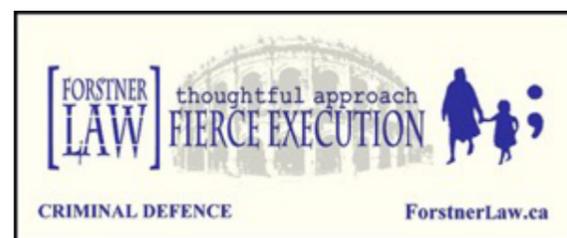
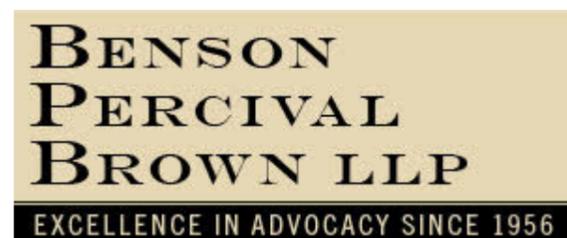
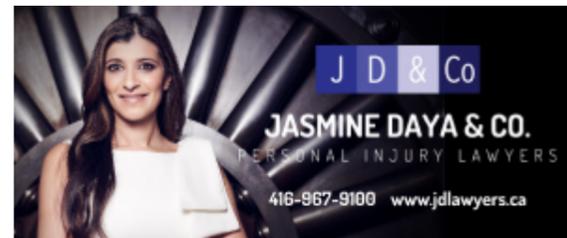
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