

**Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (RIDR)**  
**Study: Examine such issues as may arise from time to time relating to human rights**  
**generally**  
**March 20th, 2023**

**QUESTION**

**The Chair:** “[...] over the course of our study, we heard concerns about the reduced presence of Muslim chaplains in prisons due to the 2013 privatization of Canada’s federal prison chaplaincy program. A 2021 report by the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Islamic Family & Social Services Association recommended returning to the previous model. To what extent does the model for prison chaplaincy illustrate systemic Islamophobia — can you please explain that — and what elements should be included in the new policy on chaplains in prison?”

Senator Bernard has a question. Senator Bernard, when we went to Edmonton, the Muslim chaplain explained that on Fridays, he gets over 30 people listening to his sermon, and not all of them are Muslims. The program we saw in Edmonton was a success.

Can you answer my question briefly? Then Senator Bernard has a question.”

**Mr. Taylor:** “[...] That question was asked on the floor of the House last month, and a written record was produced for two ministers -- the minister that represents [Technical difficulties]. Both Liberal and Conservative MPs have asked the question about Muslims and the contract that provides chaplaincy services in our prisons. It is a matter of record in the House, and it would be prudent of me to refer you to the answer that was given to the MPs.”

**The Chair:** “Can you provide us with something? Because what happens in the House will not necessarily be part of our study. Our study and the report that we eventually write will be

based on the testimony that we hear over here, so if you could give us a written submission, we would appreciate that.”

**Mr. Taylor:** “You would like a written submission.”

**The Chair:** “Yes, if you can, so it can be part of our study. What happens in the House is a different entity and will not be part of our report.”

**Mr. Taylor:** “The report that was written by one of the people connected with the organization in Edmonton stated that the first sentence of the report said that in 2013, the Government of Canada gave the contract to deliver services or chaplaincy services in prisons to a for-profit company. The first sentence of that report was incorrect. It was a not-for-profit company. So if the first sentence, on which most of the report is based, is incorrect, we do need to read between the lines and read deeper than what is presented on paper.”

**The Chair:** “Imam, we will expect a short written submission because we have to send it to translation, and we are approaching the end of the study period.”

**Mr. Taylor:** “I’m sure that the report that was sent to the House was in English and French.”

## **RESPONSE:**

Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the follow-up. The document that I was referring to during my testimony was a response that had been provided by the Correctional Service of Canada to Parliament, through the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety. The response to Parliamentary Question Q-1105 was tabled in the House of Commons on January 30th, 2022 and I have provided a link to the Journals here for further information: [Publication Search \(ourcommons.ca\)](https://ourcommons.ca).

As you know, I have served as the Ontario Regional Chaplain at the Correctional Service of Canada since 2013 and it is there that I have seen firsthand the evolution of the Chaplaincy program within our federal correctional institutions. My employment at CSC covers the entire period that the Chair inquired about.

I would like to say that I, and my colleagues, share the goals of ensuring that offenders from all faiths have access to spiritual services and their religious freedoms upheld at all of our 43 federal institutions. This is in keeping with CSC's obligations under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and regular conversations with the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy.

During my appearance before the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, the Chair referenced a 2021 report by the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Islamic Family & Social Services Association. I would like to state that the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Chaplaincy has significant concerns about the quality of the research and the validity of the resulting criticisms, findings and recommendations. CSC's Research Branch conducted a peer review of both the Master's thesis and the journal article that informed this report, and concluded that the sample size (ten participants) and composition make it difficult to determine the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

As you are aware, the single national supplier model was adopted back in 2013 with the goal to meet and adapt to the various religious and spiritual needs of an increasingly diverse offender population. Under this model there are many chaplains who are providing spiritual services to offenders of any faith, including those who identify as Muslim, and to those of no identified faith who request chaplaincy support. In addition to chaplains, offenders are also supported in establishing or maintaining contact with their preferred faith community resource person(s) and, once identified, all efforts are made to facilitate meetings between them. It is important to note that all chaplains are fully mandated by their own faith community.

In terms of chaplaincy services that address the religious representation of offenders, I am proud to note that since 2013, service levels for Other Than Christian faiths have actually increased by 66% to ensure that they are receiving the necessary supports. This includes supports for inmates who identify as Muslim. Currently there are 18 qualified Muslim chaplains providing spiritual supports to inmates in multiple CSC institutions and in every region across the country. These Muslim chaplains meet regularly as a specific group for mutual support, to share best practices, and to discuss concerns that might be impacting them or Muslim offenders in the institutions where they serve.

In addition to this, the formal *Evaluation of CSC's Institutional Chaplaincy Services* (2019) affirmed the continued need for chaplaincy services. Furthermore, feedback from offenders has consistently reflected high levels of satisfaction regarding the religious and spiritual services provided to them.

That being said, I have read the public concerns and have also had many conversations with colleagues, inmates, and various community leaders. As CSC does with other programs and services, this particular program is subject to ongoing review and is currently engaged in a feasibility study on all available service delivery models. This review is expected to be concluded in the near future.

I, and my colleagues, will continue working to ensure that our services meet the spiritual needs of our offenders.

Imam Michael Taylor