



The Honourable Wanda Thomas Bernard, PhD, C.M., O.N.S. | L'honorable Wanda Thomas Bernard, Ph.  
D., C.M., O.N.S.  
The Honourable Kim Pate, C.M. | L'honorable Kim Pate, C.M.

## News Release

*(Le français suit)*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard and Senator Kim Pate Observe Prisoners' Justice Day – August 10, 2019**

OTTAWA, THURSDAY, AUGUST 8 2019—This Saturday, August 10, on Prisoners' Justice Day, Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard and Senator Kim Pate stand in solidarity with prisoners, their families and supporters across the country as they honour the memory of the women and men who have died unnatural deaths inside prisons.

Prisoners' Justice Day began as a commemoration of the preventable death of a prisoner in segregation at Millhaven Penitentiary 44 years ago. It is now observed around the world. Today, the pattern of silence, neglect and inaction in response to prisoners' needs and deaths remains horrifically similar.

In their work as members of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Senators Bernard and Pate have visited federal penitentiaries across the country as part of the committee's study on the human rights of federally-sentenced prisoners. The committee's [interim report](#) reflects testimony from correctional staff, community groups and prisoners about the inadequacy of human rights protections and judicial oversight of prisons.

The report documents inhumane conditions ranging from severely substandard quality and quantities of food, to inadequate access to healthcare, dental care and mental health care, to racism and discrimination, to torturous uses of solitary confinement. Too often, those who have sought to exercise their rights or speak out against injustices, whether prisoners or staff, fear and experience punitive reprisal.

For this reason, it is vital that the Senate Human Rights committee complete its study by adopting the committee's final report and recommendations for addressing the culture of human rights denial in prisons. On Prisoners' Justice Day, and every day, Parliamentarians must work to uphold the Charter and human rights for every Canadian.

Senator Bernard noted: "Prisoners' rights are human rights. We have an obligation to ensure all Canadians are treated with dignity and humanity. Permitting the harmful practice of solitary confinement to continue under the name "Structured Intervention Units" (SIU) is not a solution; it is inhumane and will not prevent unnecessary deaths in custody. Significant changes are needed to improve our current system and provide adequate access to mental health services, healthcare and culturally specific programs."

"With the Supreme Court preparing to rule on solitary confinement and a federal election looming, we need to honestly examine the manner in which we criminalize and imprison the most economically, racially, socially and personally marginalized in Canada," added Senator Pate. "We also need to continue to work to ensure that corrections is accountable to the courts, especially when it comes to the use of segregation. I extend my appreciation and respect to all those attending vigils and gatherings across the country this Prisoners' Justice Day for their vital work ensuring the truth is told and that far too many wrongs are remedied."

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