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News Release

19 Years Since Homicide: Torturous Segregation Continues

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026—Today, Canada marks the 19th anniversary of the death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith in segregation at the Grand Valley prison for women—a young woman with disabling mental health issues whose mental illness was simultaneously ignored, and exponentially exacerbated by the conditions to which she was subjected, by the Correctional Service of Canada.

This Thursday, the House of Commons will begin consideration of [Bill S-205](#), long-awaited measures to end the inhumane and unlawful conditions of segregation and solitary confinement in federal prisons that took the lives of Ashley and too many others.

Ashley died alone on the floor of a segregation cell, while those tasked with her care and custody looked on. Her death was ruled preventable by the Office of the Correctional Investigator and a homicide by the jury at the inquest into her death.

Reports from the [Correctional Investigator](#), the [Minister's own Implementation Advisory Panel](#) and [Senators](#) highlight that, contrary to government promises in response to successful court challenges nearly a decade ago, conditions of segregation recognized internationally as torture persist in Canadian prisons under other names.

Tona's Law, Bill S-205, consists of measures for oversight, remedies and alternatives to segregation advocated by Tona Mills, a survivor of more than a decade in conditions of segregation who succumbed this year to terminal cancer. Her dying wish that no one else would ever again have to live the travesties that she, Ashley, and too many others have endured.

Bill S-205 was passed by the Senate last spring. Senators have now recommended its measures to the government four times over.

"19 years after the death of Ashley Smith, the horrors of isolation remain disproportionately inflicted on Indigenous women," said House sponsor, MP Leah Gazan. "96% of women in isolation in federal prisons are Indigenous. Canada must act now to pass Bill S-205 and rectify this racist and colonialist injustice."

“I trust that Canada will honour Ashley’s memory and her family’s wishes that we alleviate their heartbreak and ongoing disappointment,” said Senate sponsor, Senator Kim Pate. “Together, through Bill S-205, we can fulfill multiple decades of promises of reform, oversee remediation of past wrongs, and make Canada a global human rights leader and guardian of justice.”

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