

## Department of Corrections required to review process for media contact with inmates

<b>Legislation</b>	Ombudsmen Act 1975
<b>Ombudsman</b>	Sir Brian Elwood
<b>Case number(s)</b>	C3699
<b>Date</b>	2000

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*Access to prison inmates by the news media—conflict between procedural manual and communications policy—policy to be reviewed to ensure consistency with procedures*

This case resulted from a complaint by a reporter from a provincial daily newspaper who was refused permission to visit an inmate. The reporter was interested in investigating some aspects of the inmate's trial and conviction and requested a face-to-face discussion with the inmate before proceeding. The Department of Corrections refused the request. Both the inmate and the reporter complained that the decision was unreasonable and unfair. They pointed out that the reporter could have visited the inmate as an ordinary visitor and was being penalised for her honesty in seeking prior approval for the visit.

The investigation revealed a conflict between the provisions of the Public Prison Service Policy and Procedure Manual (PPM) and the Department's communications policy. The Manual contained an instruction that requests from the news media to visit inmates were to be considered on a case by case basis by the General Manager, Public Prisons. On the other hand, the communications policy effectively placed a ban on media visits unless, as it was put, '*they contributed demonstrably to some re-integrative purpose*'. The complaint was resolved by the Department agreeing to undertake a review of its communications policy to ensure, among other things, that it was consistent with the Policy and Procedure Manual. It also undertook to consider a fresh application by the reporter on its merits in accordance with the Manual provisions.

## Comment

As at 2018, communication with prisoners to record what a prisoner has to say and where this is intended for publication, requires prior approval of the Chief Executive of corrections. The CE makes a decision on the matter in accordance with regulations 108 and 109 of the Corrections Regulations 2005.

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