



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Freedom of information disclosure reveals the Ministry of the Solicitor General's secret plan to radically expand Ontario's provincial jails by more than 50%

14 April 2026 (Kemptville, Ontario | unceded and unsundered Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory) – The Ministry of the Solicitor General (SolGen) plans to massively expand Ontario's provincial jail system by adding over 50% more prisoner beds by 2050, a freedom of information disclosure (FOI) has revealed. Researchers and community advocates argue the secret plan to radically increase the capacity to imprison more people makes no sense from a public policy perspective and will do more harm than good, while costing Ontario taxpayers billions of dollars that could be better spent on less costly and more effective community infrastructure and supports to improve public safety.

The three-phase plan was obtained through an FOI request submitted by Mackenzie Plumb, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa whose research examines prison construction trends in Ontario prior to and since Confederation. The SolGen plan aims to increase the province's jail capacity, which is currently around 10,000 beds, to as high as 15,670 beds by 2050. The Ford government has already announced prison building and expansion plans that will add well over 1,000 new beds, while costing Ontario taxpayers \$3 billion for construction alone. The records Plumb obtained through an FOI request show that the Ministry is planning a second phase of jail expansion that includes 1,500 more spaces for imprisoned people to be built from 2033 to 2041, along with a third phase that includes 2,000 to 3,000 more jail beds by 2050.

Taking stock of SolGen's plan to dramatically increase its capacity to imprison people, Plumb states: "While Ontario's jails are crowded right now, it's not because of a surge in violence, but rather major policy failures that have significantly increased the use of pre-trial detention. Recent statistics show that more than 80 percent of people imprisoned in Ontario provincial jails are on remand, meaning they're incarcerated as they wait for their day in court, most often for non-violent charges. Ontario's prison population could be declining but is instead climbing because the province and the federal government insist on passing measures that'll make the bail system even more dysfunctional, which impacts marginalized communities the most, especially Indigenous and Black people who are imprisoned en masse in Ontario jails". She adds: "Before the Ford government moves forward with an ill-advised jail construction binge, it should immediately enact a prison construction moratorium and commission an expert panel to facilitate community roundtables across Ontario to inform provincial efforts to enhance community safety in a manner that, unlike SolGen's excessive plan, is evidence-based, transparent, respects taxpayers, and centres the needs of victims and perpetrators while upholding human rights".

University of Ottawa criminology professor Justin Piché, who has studied prison construction and expansion across Canada for two decades, notes: "It already costs Ontario taxpayers around \$1.5 billion a year to pay for Ontario's provincial jail system. It costs more than \$350 per day to imprison a single person and the lowest a single new jail bed costs to build right now is \$1.2 million. If the province adds another 5,670 jail beds over the next 25 years, the bill for construction alone will be at least \$6.8 billion, while the cost to operate them will be over \$2 million per day, \$739 million per year or \$22.2 billion over the 30-year lifecycle cost of this planned infrastructure". Piché adds that a huge body of research shows that taxpayers' money is more effectively spent on upstream measures to improve community safety, noting: "With the \$6.8 billion it'll cost for thousands of new jail spaces, the province could instead build close to 25,000 permanent and supportive housing spaces for people seeking homes, drug treatment and recovery support, and mental health care, which research shows would do much more to make our communities more secure. The annual cost to operate the 5,670 planned jail beds could cover the costs of running over 15,000 permanent and supportive housing spaces that, unlike imprisonment, are proven to reduce lawbreaking and transform lives, while significantly cutting costs associated with paramedic calls, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations or policing, court hearings, and imprisonment". He concludes: "Instead of agreeing to fund the avalanche of new jail beds SolGen wants, the province should say NOPE – No to Ontario Prison Expansion – and invest more in community infrastructure and supports that deliver real safety".

MEDIA CONTACT FOR INTERVIEW COORDINATION (English and French)

Justin Piché, PhD – Full Professor, Criminology, uOttawa | Member, Coalition Against Proposed Prisons

justin.piche@uottawa.ca | 613-793-1093

QUOTES

“The Ford government already ambushed the small town of Kemptville in 2020 by announcing a prison there on the grounds of a former agricultural college farm without any discussion with the townspeople or its council. It seems like the province has learned nothing from the Kemptville saga and all the pushback they faced for years from local residents concerned about both the secrecy that led up to Premier Ford’s shocking jail announcement and the countless negative impacts their reckless decision may bring including bulldozing heritage farm buildings, causing environmental damage by diverting portions of a Rideau River watershed creek, and paving over prime agricultural land and floodplain. Once again, it appears that SolGen bureaucrats and their political masters at Queen’s Park in Toronto have made up their minds before talking to anyone and are now planning to flood the province with thousands of new jail beds for decades to come without consulting the taxpaying and voting public. As more communities are damaged by the Ford government’s jail boom, our Coalition Against Proposed Prisons will support residents in towns and cities across Ontario as they fight to stop prison expansion and push the province to spend more on things that actually make us safer”.

– Victor Lachance, Kemptville resident and founding member
of the Coalition Against Proposed Prisons

“Lost in the headlines about bail and jail is the fact that the overwhelming majority of people behind bars in Ontario are legally innocent awaiting court dates for non-violent offences. My research shows that thousands of people are exiting custody every year having never been convicted of any wrongdoing. These are legally innocent people that have been separated from their loved ones, lost their jobs and housing, and connections to critical community supports, while serving an unnecessary, indeterminant amount of time in jail only to have all of their charges withdrawn. Ontario should be taking real action to fix its court system, which would reduce rather than increase pre-trial detention. Building thousands of new jail beds amidst this crisis in the administration of justice not only misses the mark, it’s non-sensical. We don’t need more jail cells for innocent people”.

– Nicole Myers, Queen’s University criminologist and professor

“Building more jails when the ones we already have are failing to meet basic health and safety standards makes no sense. From my experience, these institutions – both old and new – are already unable to provide adequate care, protect people’s well-being, keep people alive or respond to crises safely. Duplicating that model at a larger scale doesn’t fix the problem, it multiplies harm. We should be asking why existing facilities cannot meet minimum standards, not pouring billions into expanding a jail system that’s already struggling to operate humanely and legally. Moreover, this plan reflects a broader shift toward more criminalization under Doug Ford’s government with poverty, mental health conditions, and substance use being treated as criminal justice problems instead of issues requiring public health and social support responses. From lived experience, I can say that putting people in cages for these issues only deepens harm. Expanding jail capacity won’t solve these crises – it’ll simply warehouse people who need care, not punishment”.

– Lindsay Jennings, researcher with the Tracking (In)Justice Project
and the Prison Health Research Council

“While politicians repeat hollow slogans like ‘jail, not bail’, and expand and build new prisons that line the pockets of their friends in construction and the prison-industrial-complex, they’re depriving communities of the resources that make us safer – education, health and mental health care, income support, housing, and other necessities of life. I urge everyone in the province to sign the Coalition Against Proposed Prisons open letter opposing the province’s jail expansion plan and send Premier Ford a clear message – when prison profiteers come asking for billions of dollars to build thousands of new jail beds, tell them NOPE – No Ontario Prison Expansion”.

– Robyn Maynard, University of Toronto professor and best-selling author of
Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present