

# Resource-strapped justice system dehumanizes people



Toronto criminal lawyer [Jacob Stilman](#) says the dehumanization of prisoners and people awaiting trial is a major problem and many would say the justice system needs an overhaul.

“If you’ve got a facility that is facing staff shortages, whose fault is that? Not the facility’s, it’s the government’s fault. How does the facility deal with it? There are going to be repercussions for the inmate population, it’s unavoidable,” he tells [Lawyers Weekly](#).

Stilman said jails alienate people in terms of the relationship between inmates and staff — much more so than they used to do.

“People are housed in pods and there is far less contact between prison staff and inmates. If you’re a guard and you have far less direct interaction with inmates, you’re going to have less empathy. That will result in greater alienation, not less,” he tells the legal trade publication.

Stilman weighs in on the topic as the issue of personal hygiene rights in provincial prisons comes to the fore. A Brampton, Ont. judge ordered the Maplehurst Correctional Complex in Milton to allow an inmate a shave and shower before appearing in court for a preliminary hearing, says the article.

“The ruling came after Justice Bruce Duncan discovered that a man facing murder charges had not been able to take care of his most basic personal hygiene needs on a regular basis in the days leading up to his first appearance in court, because the jail facility had been on lockdown, a frequent occurrence,” says the article.

Stilman says another often overlooked outcome of a lockdown is that lawyers aren’t able to see their clients at the facility.

“How do you prepare your client if they’re going to be testifying for their trial?” he asked.

Stilman says the situation at jails and prisons will likely worsen before it gets better because adequate resources simply aren't made available.

“At the federal level, you have a government that sees to its electoral advantage to always be coming down hard on the criminals. It has made gains in popularity by cultivating the perception that they are tough on criminals and aren’t going to coddle prisoners. It’s a point of pride to reduce programing while increasing populations and mandatory sentences,” he said.

“It’s counter-productive because these people will be less equipped for their release, not more. People are going to be released after longer sentences with fewer resources and coping mechanisms. They’ll have less ability to deal with addictions or other maladaptive behaviours.”