



MEDIA STATEMENT

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BRANCH

January 6, 2015

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Criminal Justice Branch Implements Vulnerable Victim and Witness Policy

Victoria – Effective December 29, 2014, the Criminal Justice Branch, Ministry of Justice (CJB), implemented a new policy on best practices for supporting adult vulnerable victims and witnesses in criminal prosecutions.

In *The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*, Commissioner Wally Oppal, QC recommended that a policy be put in place "to provide guidance on the prosecution of crimes of violence against vulnerable women, including women engaged in the sex trade".

Following release of this *Report*, the Branch undertook a review of the policies and practices it had in place for supporting victims and witnesses. As part of the review, the Branch considered whether it should develop a policy that is specifically tailored to vulnerable victims and witnesses, and responsive to Commissioner Oppal's recommendation.

Ultimately, the Branch decided to develop a tailored policy, recognizing that for cases involving allegations of serious personal injury, in particular, vulnerable victims and witnesses require ongoing support throughout the prosecution. The new policy identifies best practices for Crown Counsel in assisting these persons to effectively participate in the criminal justice process. This includes:

- identifying and assigning prosecution files that require victim and witness support early in the process;
- reducing the number of prosecutors who have conduct of a file over time to ensure continuity of file ownership;
- seeking appropriate protective conditions as part of any bail order;
- actively engaging with vulnerable victims and witnesses through the prosecution to encourage their ongoing participation;
- bringing timely applications for access to the *Criminal Code's* various support provisions for victims and witnesses;
- cross sector consultation with other justice system agencies to access support;
- assisting with Victim Impact Statements; and
- seeking appropriate protective conditions as part of any orders made at sentencing.

Branch Vision

Courageous, Fair and Efficient – A Prosecution Service that has the Confidence of the Public.

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A copy of the new policy, VUL 1 – Vulnerable Victims and Witnesses - Adult, is attached to this media statement.

All policies that are developed by the Criminal Justice Branch and guide the exercise of prosecutorial discretion are public documents and are available online at:

<http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/prosecution-service/policy-man/index.htm>

These policies assist Crown Counsel in carrying out their responsibilities under the *Crown Counsel Act*. As a matter of general practice, Branch policies are subject to ongoing review and revision to accommodate changes in the law, or respond to social and systemic issues.

The Vulnerable Victims and Witnesses - Adult policy was developed in consultation with senior Crown Counsel who have extensive experience and specialized expertise in prosecutions involving vulnerable participants, and took into account recognized best practices in this area to ensure an informed set of guidelines.

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To learn more about B.C.'s criminal justice system visit the British Columbia Prosecution Service website at:

<http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/prosecution-service/>

or Justice B.C. :

www.justicebc.ca/en/cjis/index.html