

Progress Report – Proposals for Reform in Criminal Justice

Responding to the Call for Reform

When government's Green Paper, “Modernizing British Columbia’s Justice System”, was released in 2012, the Criminal Justice Branch (the Branch) responded with a comprehensive list of innovative “Proposals for Reform” that were specific to B.C.’s Prosecution Service. In his final report as Chair of the B.C. Justice Reform Initiative, Mr. Geoffrey Cowper, Q.C. endorsed the Proposals, describing them as “a very impressive response to virtually every concern raised during [his] review”.

The Branch understands that its initiatives form but one part of a larger, system-wide requirement for reform and that further, cross-sector collaborative work between the Branch and other justice system participants is needed to achieve long-term, sustainable change and efficiencies. To this end, the Branch is an active member of the newly formed Justice and Public Safety Council and the Ministry of Justice executive.

Reporting on our Commitments

The Branch committed to using its best efforts to substantially complete the Proposals for Reform by December 2013. This report provides details on the progress made thus far.

Completed Reforms

- Enhanced Crown ‘file ownership’ of prosecution files has been introduced to achieve greater continuity of file conduct, with the intended positive effect of facilitating pro-active case management and improved trial preparation.
- The Branch has revised its policy on plea resolutions to facilitate increased resolution of prosecution files at the front end of the litigation process. The policy is publicly available on the [B.C. Prosecution Service website](#).
- Effective February 3, 2014, the Branch implemented a series of “Quality Control Standards”, consisting of various best practices that are designed to increase the Branch’s efficiency in case processing and file management. An example includes a renewed emphasis on full disclosure at the time an investigative file is transferred to the Branch from police, in order to ensure file completeness for the purpose of charge assessment, disclosure to the defence and trial readiness.
- Production and distribution of training materials for police across the province to assist with better understanding and facilitating their disclosure obligations.
- Technology improvements aimed at enhancing interagency information-flow, including the JUSTIN/PRIME multi-push project, which allows for more comprehensive disclosure of Report to Crown Counsel information between police and the Branch.
- Development of an internal quality assurance audit committee that reviews case management practices and identifies areas for improvement.
- A management model for major cases has been implemented, utilizing a project-management approach for the efficient and effective conduct of the Branch’s largest, high profile cases.

As an integral part of the Ministry of Justice, the Criminal Justice Branch delivers on its core responsibilities in a manner that safeguards prosecutorial independence and supports an effective justice system through communication, collaborative effort and innovation.

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- Implementation of an online file closing survey for gathering internal business intelligence and tracking major decision-points along the life of a prosecution file. Survey information is used to inform policy and practise, and for continuous improvement purposes.
- Collaborative, active contribution of business intelligence for Branch-specific and ministry wide justice sector planning, analysis, and open data strategies. Key performance indicators and metrics have been developed specific to the Prosecution Service. They are aligned with and designed to measure improvement in achieving the Branch Vision: ***Courageous, Fair and Efficient – A Prosecution Service that Has the Confidence of the Public.***
- Development of a new external communications strategy that is focused on increased transparency of Branch decision making on high profile prosecution files, so that the public is better informed of the rationale underlying the decision, the process by which it came about and the factors that were considered.

Reforms That Are Active and Ongoing

- Under the leadership and authority of the Provincial Court of British Columbia, the Branch has worked cooperatively with the Court and Court Services Branch (Ministry of Justice) to support a redesign of the criminal case scheduling system, with a view to streamlining the process where feasible and decreasing delay to trial. This work is ongoing through to at least 2015.
- The Branch continues to explore the principled, expanded use of Direct Indictments to move cases directly into the Supreme Court of British Columbia when delay to trial is a reasonably-based concern.
- Implementation of a second phase of an electronic disclosure system (ICON II - Integrated Corrections Operations Network) which provides case-specific information to in-custody accused persons.
- Continued refinement of an index that seeks to measure the complexity of prosecution files for the purpose of planning and resource allocation.
- The Branch continues its work on improved tracking of the reasons for return of Reports to Crown Counsel to police or other investigative agencies with no charges approved, in order to inform both prosecution and law enforcement policy and practice.

I am grateful for the professionalism of all members of B.C.'s Prosecution Service, and for their commitment to achieving our justice reform milestones over the last two years.

**M. Joyce DeWitt-Van Oosten, Q.C.
Assistant Deputy Attorney General
Criminal Justice Branch**

Moving Forward

In the spirit of continuous improvement and collaboration within B.C.'s justice and public safety sector, subject to funding availability, the Branch will continue with its proactive commitment to deliver on justice reform initiatives that increase the effectiveness, and the efficiency of criminal justice services. These priorities are outlined in the Criminal Justice Branch 2014/15 – 2016/17 Strategic Plan, which is publicly available on the [B.C. Prosecution Service website](#).