

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

News Release - 22 August 2024

**The Underfunding Crisis Crippling BC's Justice System Continues:
Crown prosecutor shortage risks criminal case delays**

BCPS: "the BC Prosecution Service is not seeking to budget any additional requests for Crown counsel for the Vernon Crown office".

VANCOUVER, BC – Trial Lawyers Association of British Columbia (TLABC) is calling on the BC Government to reverse the recently announced decision by the BC Prosecution Service (BCPS) that no additional permanent Crown counsel will be allocated to the Vernon Crown office. This decision is particularly troubling given the growing population and the increasingly complex nature of criminal cases - criminal matters in the Vernon area will be delayed because of this decision.

Michael Elliott, President of TLABC, stated, "This decision by the BC Prosecution Service is a stark reminder of the ongoing underfunding crisis within our justice system. In recent months, BC has faced an escalating series of courtroom closures, because the government underfunded the BC Sheriff Service, leading to a serious Sheriff shortage across the province. On top of the courtroom closures, the Government is now refusing to fund fully staffed Crown prosecutor offices. The refusal to increase the number of Crown prosecutors in Vernon not only places undue pressure on the current legal professionals but also jeopardizes the timely administration of justice. A shortage of Crown prosecutors in Vernon will obviously lead to delays for criminal matters in the area."

The BC Crown Counsel Association has highlighted the critical need for increasing the number of Crown prosecutors in Vernon from six to nine. This increase is essential to manage the growing caseload effectively. The Vernon population has surged by approximately 33% over the past two decades, yet the number of Crown prosecutors has remained stagnant. Furthermore, the complexity of criminal cases has also escalated, necessitating additional legal resources.

"The justice system is the cornerstone of our society, and it is imperative that we provide it with the necessary resources to function effectively," Elliott continued. "The current situation in Vernon is unsustainable and threatens to undermine public confidence in our legal system. We call on the provincial government to take immediate action to address this critical shortfall."

TLABC reiterates its commitment to advocating for a well-resourced and accessible justice system for all British Columbians. The Association urges the Attorney General and the BC Prosecution Service to reconsider their decision and to prioritize the allocation of sufficient resources to ensure that justice is served without delay in Vernon and throughout British Columbia.

Backgrounder:

On 18 August 2024, Castanet reported¹ that Jennifer Johnson, Vice President of the BC Crown Counsel Association, was seeking an increase on the number of Crown counsel attached to the Vernon Crown office, and that increasing the number of permanent counsel would speed up the processing of files in criminal matters

No additional Crown counsel have been added to the Vernon office since 2001, despite a 33 per cent population increase, and in spite of Crown counsel facing increasingly complex criminal matters, a growing number of charter applications and more disclosure.

Castanet reported on 21 August, 2024², that:

“Ann Seymour with the BCPS said the distribution of prosecutors within a region is the responsibility of the Regional Crown Counsel.

‘At this point, the BC Prosecution Service is not seeking to budget any additional requests for Crown counsel for the Vernon Crown office,’ said Seymour in an email.”

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<https://www.castanet.net/news/Vernon/501803/More-prosecutors-needed-as-Vernon-grows-criminal-matters-more-compllicated>

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<https://www.castanet.net/news/Vernon/502272/No-plans-for-additional-permanent-Crown-counsel-in-Vernon-BC-Prosecution-Service>