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#JusticeReformBC: Broad coalition of legal organizations calling for significant reform to British Columbia's justice system

Pivot Legal Society, Community Legal Assistance Society, BC Civil Liberties Association, and West Coast LEAF are calling on the provincial government to implement significant changes to BC's justice and legal systems in order to support marginalized and Indigenous communities in the province, and to improve the delivery of justice to all British Columbians.

The organizations urged the BC Government to work closely with Indigenous communities to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to respect Aboriginal Rights and Title.

The coalition of non-partisan organizations working on justice issues proposed reforms that are principally under the responsibility of the Attorney General and the Solicitor General. The recommendations are categorized into ten main areas of law and policy, including, but not limited to policing, corrections, access to justice, family law, mental illness and addiction, poverty and income inequality, and human rights. The full list of recommendations can be read [here](#).

While many of the recommendations require time to implement, the coalition pointed to a number of pressing and quickly achievable reforms including the following:

- Taking immediate steps to reform policing practices in BC that are harmful to marginalized communities, especially in the context of overdose prevention sites. "In order to address the current overdose crisis, police departments across the province should take a harm reduction approach and **stop arresting people who are in possession of small amounts of drugs, and the people who are providing health services to them,**" said Katrina Pacey, Executive Director of Pivot Legal Society. "It is also important that the government take systemic action to end racial discrimination against First Nations and racialized communities by police."
- Reforming BC's Corrections system by appointing an **Independent Advisor on Corrections Reform** to lead the process of change in BC's prison system to ensure it is humane, fair, produces better outcomes for society, and to end the over-representation of Indigenous people in prison. "The government should also commit to the ultimate goal of **abolishing solitary confinement** in BC jails and start by immediately committing to meet the UN's legal standard for solitary confinement," said Josh Paterson, Executive Director of the BC Civil Liberties Association. "This means prohibiting solitary confinement for longer than 15 days, prohibiting it for prisoners with mental illness or disabilities, women and minors, and putting in place a strong independent review process."

- Increasing access to justice by **expanding funding to family law, and criminal, mental health, poverty, and refugee legal aid.** “Access to the justice system has been severely restricted in the last decade and a half. Women, people with mental health issues, refugees, people living in poverty, and those charged with criminal offences have all suffered disproportionately, particularly with the drastic cuts to legal aid,” said Kasari Govender, Executive Director of West Coast LEAF. “We are looking to the new provincial government to take immediate and comprehensive action to address this massive gap between those who can afford access to the justice system and those who are left out. The government should increase funding for legal aid without delay, and improve access to justice province wide by restoring the legal aid clinic system.”
- **Amend the *Residential Tenancy Act* to close loopholes** allowing landlords to unfairly raise rents or evict tenants, to improve the rental housing dispute resolution system, protect tenants with pets, and increase compensation to tenants who are being evicted because of landlord use and renovations (“renovictions”). “Renters, in particular, have had little meaningful recourse when they have been wronged by landlords,” said Aleem Bharmal, Executive Director of Community Legal Assistance Society. “By implementing some of the changes suggested, the new government can go a long way to improving conditions for many across the province.”

The proposed recommendations for change across the legal system will help empower the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our communities in a substantive, timely manner, said the groups. “There are a number of critical things that the government can do quickly—in weeks and months, not years—to make a huge difference and get the justice system on the right track,” said Josh Paterson, Executive Director of the BC Civil Liberties Association.

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About

Pivot Legal Society, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, West Coast LEAF, and Community Legal Assistance Society represent four legal organizations with a shared mandate to create a more equitable and just society for vulnerable communities throughout British Columbia. Our organizations are dedicated to strengthening our justice system and ensuring that the principles of equality, freedom, and human dignity are respected.

West Coast LEAF is a non-profit organization formed in 1985, the year the equality guarantees of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. West Coast LEAF’s mission is to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of discrimination against women through BC-based equality rights litigation, law reform, and public legal education. To learn more, visit: <http://www.westcoastleaf.org>.