



## CITY OF LANGLEY

### MOTION

#### **Equitable Court Access – City of Langley**

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WHEREAS gaps in service within the Provincial Courts continues to deny timely and equitable access to justice services for all British Columbians and will only be exacerbated by rapid population growth; thus, resulting in harms by prolonging closure for individuals awaiting court judgements, inefficient use of police time for travel, and greater challenges for those with limited access to public transit or transportation.

AND WHEREAS although recent investments made by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General (JAG) have increased capacity at specific courthouses, the investments have not facilitated equitable access for all British Columbians or met service level requirements.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that UBCM direct the Province of BC to identify and address current gaps in service in the Provincial Courts; and further, release an updated Courthouse Capital Asset Management Plan (CAMP) which reflects new growth projections and future service level needs.

## Background:

With increasing pressure due to a high volume of cases, coupled with vacant staffing positions, timely access to justice services across the province is often not a possibility. In 2023 an organization comprised of lawyers advocating for access to justice issues, [The Advocates' Society](#), released an [in-depth analysis](#) of the challenges within our justice system. Some British Columbia specific statistics in the report are as follows:

- The [2022 Supreme Court of British Columbia Annual Report](#) identifies that in 2022, “the Supreme Court delayed 10.9% of all long chambers applications, 24.6% of civic trials and 14.4% of family trials”.
- On average, delays affect 25% of civil trials.

The Vancouver Sun posted an [article](#) on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 which discusses courtroom staff shortages. As stated in the article, “According to figures released Tuesday by the Attorney General Ministry, which oversees the B.C. Sheriff Service, only six courtrooms were closed or had delays from 2018 to 2022 due to sheriff shortages. But so far this year, there have been 88 such closures or delays, resulting in cases being adjourned or rescheduled”. When considering escalating year over year vacancies, coupled with new demands from population growth, without immediate investment it can be expected that the situation will escalate. The most recent [BC Stats Report](#) regarding population growth projections speculate a growth of 44% by 2046.

Separate from the obvious inconvenience, the negative impacts of delays in justice on victims or individuals seeking resolution is notable. In a report from the [Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs](#) they explain, “Many victims carry an emotional burden with them that they hope will become lighter when the responsible person is found guilty of the crime and justice is done. The months and perhaps years of carrying that burden to court date after court date, during cross-examinations, and through adjournments, can take a heavy toll.”

[Previous motions](#) from rural communities have been endorsed by the UBCM membership, requesting improved access to justice and the courts. Separate reports have identified shortfalls in equitable access to court services within the province. For example, [Restoring Court Operations in Northern, Remote and Indigenous Communities](#). While there are more than 80 BC Provincial Court Locations, geographical gaps in service remain. Those without access to a robust public transit network and people with disabilities are at a clear disadvantage.

Previous task groups have been effective in identifying long-term requirements to address gaps in service and ensure adequate levels of service from the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General (JAG). One example being the [Lower Fraser Valley Courts Capacity Expansion Project](#), where most recommendations can be correlated with subsequent investments. As one option moving forward, the Province of BC could create a multi-stakeholder task group to complete a province wide audit and following recommend solutions. Regardless of the means, the required outcome is clear. We require significant investment by the Province of BC to restore time sensitive and equitable access to court services and request that they begin this work immediately.