

Legal help and information if you represent yourself

If you do not have a lawyer, you will have to prepare your case and do the research to represent yourself. You will need to learn about the court system, the specific law in your case, what you and the “other side” must both prove, what defences you have, and all the possible arguments for your case.

Specific help with your case—in person and by phone

Legal Aid (Legal Services Society of BC)

You may be able to get free legal help (legal aid) if:

- your legal problem is covered by legal aid rules,
- your income and the value of your property are below a certain limit, and
- you have no other way of getting legal help

Call 604.408.2172 in the lower mainland and 1.866.577.2525 elsewhere in BC.

See the Legal Services Society website at www.lss.bc.ca for locations of legal aid clinics and more information.

Lawline (Legal Services Society of BC)

Lawline can provide free legal information or referrals to other sources for anyone who can't get legal aid or afford a lawyer. People who meet certain financial guidelines can also get legal advice or help with legal documents and procedures. Call 604.408.2172 in the lower mainland and 1.866.577.2525 elsewhere in BC. Press 7 for Lawline.

Lawyer Referral Service (Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch)

This service will help you find a lawyer who will meet with you for 30 minutes for \$10.

Call 604.687.3221 in the lower mainland and 1.800.663.1919 elsewhere in BC.

Duty Counsel (at the courthouse)

Duty counsel is a lawyer at the courthouse who can give you quick and free legal advice, and may be able to assist you briefly in provincial court for criminal law and family law matters. For example, duty counsel could help you postpone your case or represent you in a bail hearing. Duty counsel cannot represent you at a trial.

Law student clinics in Vancouver and Victoria

If you live in the lower mainland or Victoria, you may be able to get legal advice and information from:

UBC Law Student's Legal Advice Program in Vancouver

This program is only for people with low income. It does not cover cases of family law, personal injury, Supreme Court, or for claims over \$10,000. There are many clinics in the lower mainland. Call 604.822.5791 or see the program website at www.lslap.bc.ca.

The Law Centre – University of Victoria Faculty of Law – in Victoria

The Centre provides advice, assistance, and representation to people who cannot afford a lawyer. The Centre covers law in the following areas: criminal matters, divorce, support and other family law matters, human rights, civil disputes, hearings before administrative tribunals for employment insurance, welfare, landlord and tenant disputes, and Canada Pension Plan. The Centre also gives free legal education classes.

Call 250.385.1221 or see the website at www.thelawcentre.ca.

The Salvation Army's Pro Bono Lawyer Consultant Program

This program helps people who cannot afford a lawyer and who cannot get legal aid. Lawyers will provide legal assistance, help prepare legal documents, and prepare you for court in the areas of criminal, family, immigration, labour, welfare law, and in some areas of civil law, but the lawyer will not appear in court with you. There are clinics in many parts of BC.

Call 604.872.7681 or see the website at www.probono.ca.

Western Canada Society to Access Justice

Volunteer lawyers provide free legal assistance in criminal, family, immigration and civil matters for those who cannot afford legal services (means test required). Lawyers do not represent clients in court but do give legal advice and help clients prepare for court appearances.

To find a Clinic near you, call 604.878.7400.

Elizabeth Fry Societies

Advocacy and support services for adolescent and adult women in conflict with the law or at risk of coming in conflict with the law. To find out more about these services, call:

- Greater Vancouver 604.520.1166
- Kamloops 250.374.2119
- Kelowna 250.763.4613
- Prince George 250.563.1113
- Ashcroft 250.453.9656

Anti-Poverty Advocates – www.povnet.org/advocates/bc-map.html

A list of community-based advocates throughout British Columbia listed on a website. To find an advocate where you live, click on a town near you, and you will get a list of non-profit organisations that may be able to assist you.

General legal information – by phone, booklet, website, or book

To educate yourself about the law, the cases and the possible arguments in your case, you will have to do some legal research; this can be a long, complicated process. You will have to collect information from various places and, if you have access, from websites.

Here are a few basic resources to start with:

Dial-a-Law (Canadian Bar Association, BC) – www.bcba.org

Call and listen to recordings of legal information on over 130 topics. Have a pen and paper ready. Call 604.687.4680 in the lower mainland and 1.800.565.5297 elsewhere in BC.

Go to the website to read and print the information (see *Visitors* section).

Legal Services Society – www.lss.bc.ca

Legal Aid offices and this website have information on:

- Appeal Procedures
- Legal Research
- Criminal Charges
- Fines
- Legal Aid
- No Contact Orders
- Trial Procedure
- Women/Abuse

Family Law Website (Legal Services Society) – www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca

This website provides general information about family law, self-help kits about divorce, custody applications and support orders, as well as information on child protection and removal issues.

BC Ministry of Attorney General – www.gov.bc.ca/ag

Booklets are available in most courthouses and agencies on:

- Bail
- Divorce
- Interpreters
- Small Claims Court
- Trial Procedure
- Wills & Estates

The website has information on:

- The Court System
- Small Claims Court Process
- Family Issues including Family Maintenance Enforcement
- Dispute Resolution
- Human Rights Protection

And other related links

BC Ministry of Children and Family Development – www.mcf.gov.bc.ca

Website with information on family law.

The Law Centre (University of Victoria Faculty of Law) – www.thelawcentre.ca

Free legal education classes, as well as fact sheets, booklets and self-help kits on:

- Small Claims Court
- Defending Traffic Tickets
- Family Court

This information is also available on their website. Call 250.385.1221

The People’s Law School – www.publiclegaled.bc.ca

The People’s Law School has printed information on family law, and information on various topics on their website. Phone 604.331.5400. Located at 150 – 900 Howe Street in Vancouver.

Law Courts Education Society – www.lawcourtsed.ca

Printed legal information on the court system in general, and information in six languages for unrepresented accused on their website. Phone 604.660.9870. Head office located at 260 – 800 Hornby Street in Vancouver.

The John Howard Society of BC – www.johnhoward.bc.ca

A wide range of programs and activities for adults and youth involved in conflict with the law. Offered in 15 communities across BC. For details, see the website or call 1.250.386.3428.

Provincial Court of British Columbia website – www.provincialcourt.bc.ca

Information on appeals, alternatives to trial, frequently asked questions, the complaint process, a court locations map as well as some information about criminal, youth, family, small claims, traffic, bylaw matters and related laws.

BC Supreme Court and BC Appeal Court website – www.courts.gov.bc.ca

This website has the Rules of Court, and decisions that you can study.

Best Guide to Canadian Legal Research – www.legalresearch.org

A starting point for legal research. Effective strategies and techniques for Canadian legal research, finding and using secondary sources, finding and analysing cases, updating your research, legal writing, and frequently asked questions.

Access to Justice Network – www.acjnet.org

Another starting point for legal research, including information on hundreds of legal topics.

Department of Justice, Canada – www.canada.justice.gc.ca

Information on issues related to federal laws. For example, federal statutes and regulations, constitutional documents, court decisions, child support guidelines, and immigration matters.

BC Courthouse Libraries – www.bccls.bc.ca

There are 35 courthouse libraries in communities throughout British Columbia where you can do legal research for your case. The Vancouver Courthouse Library, at 800 Smithe Street in Vancouver, is the largest. Call toll-free 1-800-665-2570 to find the library nearest you or use the website above.

Books – many public libraries have books on common offenses and general legal issues, but some of the following may be available only at law school libraries and courthouse libraries:

Criminal law:

- Criminal Code of Canada (annotated)
- Black's Law Dictionary
- Canada's System of Justice (Department of Justice, Canada)
- Criminal Pleadings and Practice in Canada (E.C. Ewaschuk)
- The Law of Evidence (D. M. Paccioco)
- Provincial Court of British Columbia Caseflow Management Rules

Common Offences:

- Breathalyser Law in Canada (Roderick McLeod)
- The Impaired Driving and Breathalyser Law Manual
- The Law of Theft and Related Offences (W.H. Holland)
- Defending Drug Cases (P. M. Bolton)

Family Law:

- The Family Law Sourcebook (Continuing Legal Education of BC)

Legal Skills:

- Cross Examination, the Art of the Advocate (Roger Salhany)
- Examination of Witnesses in a Criminal Trial (Earl Levy)
- Legal Research Handbook (Douglas MacEllven)

Read these documents also:

- *How a criminal trial works*
- *How to prepare your case*
- *How to take notes during your trial*
- *How to behave in court*
- *Representing yourself in a criminal trial*