



NCLGA RESOLUTION –BC PROSECUTION SERVICE AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

WHEREAS prolific offenders in British Columbia are routinely released without consequences or meaningful conditions imposed upon them;

AND WHEREAS the BC Prosecution Service’s vision statement guides them to make impartial charge assessment decisions that promote public safety, justice, and respect for the rule of law and the BC Prosecution Service often determines not to recommend charges be pursued for criminal offences that are referred by the RCMP, as charges are not in the public interest;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NCLGA lobby the Provincial Government to ensure the BC Prosecution Service (Crown Counsel) live up to its vision, mission, and value statements and consider public safety and fairness when dealing with prolific offenders, and furthermore that guidelines be developed as to what constitutes “the public interest” with respect to pursuing charges for criminal offences.

BACKGROUND:

The Crown Counsel Act¹ entrusts the Criminal Justice Branch with the responsibility to approve and conduct all prosecutions of offenses in British Columbia. The Assistant Deputy Attorney General is charged with the Administration of that Branch, and with carrying out its functions and responsibilities.

In British Columbia it has been the practice of Crown Counsel to release offenders of crimes without charges or conditions, citing charges are not in the public interest. Repeat offenders are free to recommit crimes without consequences as a result. A disproportionate amount of crime, particularly property crime, is committed by a minority of habitual offenders². Unfortunately, communities, local business owners and workers, the economy, as well as the public feel the impacts of repeat offenders who commit property crimes and thefts repeatedly and without consequence. For example, in Terrace in 2021 there were 423 failure to appear in court warrants, but only two people were charged. Two individuals in Terrace failed to appear in court 26 and 21 times each from February 2021 to February 2022. Neither have been charged with Fail to Appear. There was an average of six failure to appear warrants each week which is a burden on the RCMP to administer and ultimately is fruitless as there are no consequences for not appearing in court.

The revolving door of crime, apprehension by the authorities, and then the subsequent release of these habitual offenders erodes public confidence in our legal system. Police and law enforcement agencies as well as victim services are also burdened by repeat

calls and reports of crime. Regarding youth, it has been estimated that averting a 14-year old from a path of criminality would save society \$3 to \$5 million.³

There have been numerous police-based initiatives in British Columbia as well as other jurisdictions to try to manage prolific offenders. While there are different approaches to prolific offender management, they all require the cooperation of multiple agencies to implement. For example, "Polibation" is an approach to deal with prolific offenders that involves targeted and intensive surveillance from the police and probation programs. They involve a team of service providers that deliver interventions that are specific to the individual, including substance use and mental health treatment. Any subsequent criminal activity or breaches of the sentence conditions by the individual are dealt with by prompt apprehension and conviction.⁴ Programs like these are only possible when the Crown is willing to participate, and charge repeat offenders. When the Crown is unwilling to charge offenders, they are creating a burden on others such as the public, businesses, and law enforcement agencies. The BC Prosecution Service's own vision is to be an independent prosecution service that people respect and trust. Public trust has been eroded by the Crown's reticence to press charges on prolific offenders.

Sources:

1. Crown Counsel Act
https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96087_01
2. Croisdale, T.E. (2007). The Persistent Offender: A longitudinal analysis. PhD Dissertation, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University.
3. Cohen, M.A., and Piquero, A. (2009) "The Monetary Value of Saving a High Risk Youth", *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14: 5-33
4. Rezansoff, S., Moniruzzaman, A., Somers, J. (2008) An Initiative to Improve Outcomes Among Prolific and Priority Offenders in Six British Columbia Communities: Preliminary Analysis of Recidivism Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/justice-reform-initiatives/ppom.pdf>