
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Attorney General
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC First Nations Justice Council
British Columbia Assembly of First Nations
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
First Nations Summit

First Nations organizations, Province endorse new First Nations Justice Strategy

NANAIMO – First Nations people can look forward to significant changes in the justice system following a decision by the BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) and the Province to endorse and sign a new First Nations Justice Strategy.

The BCFNJC’s action is supported by resolutions from the BC Assembly of First Nations, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the First Nations Summit.

“It is an honour to be part of the first justice strategy for Indigenous peoples in British Columbia that is authored by Indigenous peoples themselves,” said David Eby, Attorney General. “That it took this long to happen is tragic. That it is finally happening should bring hope for a better future. I look forward to working with Indigenous peoples and leaders across the justice sector on this historic initiative.”

The First Nations Justice Strategy sets a path for the partners involved in the strategy and the criminal justice system to work together to:

- reduce the number of First Nations people who become involved with the criminal justice system;
- improve the experience of those who do;
- increase the number of First Nations people working within the justice system; and
- support First Nations to restore their Indigenous justice systems and structures.

“The First Nations Justice Strategy provides direction for the transformation of a system that has been pulverizing our people for generations,” said Doug White, chair, BCFNJC. “We have sought partnership with the Government of B.C. to reshape the criminal justice system and to begin to build the path to true Indigenous justice systems that are rooted in Indigenous self-determination and authority.”

Work will begin by engaging impacted government ministries on the development of a joint implementation plan, recognizing that many of the strategies will take further engagement and funding, along with the involvement of the federal government.

The joint strategy is born out of a 2017 memorandum of understanding between the Government of B.C. and BCFNJC. It is based on engagement with First Nations leadership, ministries, non-profits and police services that work within the existing criminal justice system.

“Under the strategy, BC Corrections will play a critical role in improving the experience of Indigenous people who become involved with the criminal justice system,” said Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General. “So much of what’s happening in corrections is being led and shaped by Indigenous peoples. That’s what makes the joint strategy so promising: it’s First Nations led.”

Strategy highlights include:

- a two-path approach that transforms the existing criminal justice system and builds the path toward restoring First Nations laws and justice systems;
- establishing a network of 15 regional First Nations Justice Centres around the province;
- developing a systemic approach to implementing the Gladue decision;
- establishing a presumption of diversion to divert First Nations people from the court system, wherever possible;
- improving cultural competency in the justice system;
- establishing roles for Elders and Knowledge Keepers within the justice system; and
- increasing community justice programming in each First Nations community.

Over the coming months, Ministry of Attorney General staff and the BCFNJC will continue working together to develop plans to implement the strategy.

Quotes:

Don Tom, vice-president, BC Union of Indian Chiefs –

“Indigenous women and girls are over policed and under protected. As reported by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report and Human Rights Watch, Indigenous women who are survivors of crime often don’t trust the police enough to report it and face criminalization when they do. When involved in the criminal justice system, Indigenous women and girls are more likely to plead guilty, receive longer sentences and less likely to have adequate legal representation. They serve longer sentences for most of their crimes, which are administrative in nature and poverty related, and Gladue requirements are rarely met. This strategy brings justice system attention and resources to creating better justice system outcomes for women and girls.”

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations –

“This strategy creates the necessary space for recognition and implementation of Indigenous justice systems. First Nations will have the opportunity to restore and reclaim their legal systems and structures according to specific traditions, laws, knowledge, experiences and contexts. This will necessarily include the expansion of many community-based justice programs, which are vital to testing and advancing transformation of the justice system.”

Lydia Hwistum, First Nations Summit Task Group –

“Twenty-one years after the landmark Gladue court decision, Indigenous incarceration rates in B.C. have tripled to over 30%. This unjust reality amounts to an astonishing crisis in Canadian society arising from the failure of the criminal justice system to embrace clear direction from Parliament and the Supreme Court of Canada. Now, through the First Nations Justice Strategy, our shared commitment is to tackle this unjust intransigence and create systemic change in a

comprehensive and integrated way across the criminal justice system to ensure fair and equitable treatment of Indigenous peoples.”

Learn More:

Read the 2020 First Nations Justice Strategy:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/First_Nations_Justice_Strategy_Feb_2020.pdf

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