



LSS emphasizes early intervention and early resolution of clients' legal problems where appropriate.

Legal representation and advice

Family and child protection law

Family law: Legal representation is available to help financially eligible people in emergency situations who need immediate court orders to protect their own and their children's safety and security or to resolve serious denial of access to their children. Representation is also available for financially eligible people who have to go to court for a maintenance enforcement hearing if they are very likely to go to jail as a result. Additional circumstances where representation is provided include mental or physical disabilities that prevent financially eligible people from representing themselves.

Depending on available funding and a person's specific circumstances, legal representation may be available for serious issues in high conflict cases or in situations when all other efforts to solve the case – including a written settlement offer to the opposing party – have been exhausted and solving it will make a significant difference to them or their children.

People who are not eligible for representation but who have a significant case that they cannot solve on their own may be referred to a lawyer for other services to help solve the dispute.

Child protection law: Legal representation is provided to financially eligible people whose children have been taken or are at risk of being taken from them by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), or who have custody and access issues relating to a child in the care of the MCFD.

Family duty counsel at most Provincial Courts and the busiest Supreme Courts across BC provide advice and other help with family and child protection law matters. They can prepare for and attend family case conferences and judicial case conferences with clients at courts in Kamloops, Kelowna, Port Coquitlam, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Surrey, Terrace, Vancouver, and Victoria. LSS expects to expand this service to other locations in 2007. These lawyers do not represent clients at trial. There is a financial eligibility test for most family duty counsel services.

Family advice lawyers are located at family justice counsellor (FJC) offices in communities with an LSS regional centre. Advice lawyers help unrepresented clients prepare for their court appearance and follow up on what took place during the proceedings. The lawyers also help low income parents who are going through the FJC mediation process to settle their separation or divorce matters.

Immigration and refugee law

Immigration law: LSS provides assistance to financially eligible people who need help with a refugee claim or an immigration problem that could lead to their deportation to a country where they would be at risk, and their case has a reasonable chance of success. Legal representation is provided for a limited number of judicial review and appeal cases (these must have a substantial chance of success).

Immigration duty counsel advise people held in custody at Citizenship & Immigration Canada's Vancouver Enforcement Office and may represent them at detention hearings.

Criminal law

Criminal law: Legal representation is available for financially eligible people who are charged with a criminal offence and if found guilty face jail, a conditional sentence that would severely limit their liberty, loss of livelihood, or deportation. Additional circumstances where representation is provided include youths under the age of 18 for all federal offences (per the Youth Criminal Justice Act) and financially eligible accused who do not face jail but cannot defend themselves because of a mental or physical disability.

Criminal duty counsel give people advice about the charges against them, court procedures, and legal rights (including the right to counsel and the right to apply for a legal aid lawyer). Services are available for in- and out-of-custody clients and may include representation at hearings to enter a guilty plea or speak to sentence, as well as at judicial interim release hearings and initial appearances.



The **Brydges Line** is a province-wide toll-free telephone service that provides prompt access to legal advice for people who are arrested or detained, or who are under active investigation by the police or other law enforcement agencies but are not yet charged and need emergency services. Interpreters are available for callers who do not speak English.

A pilot project provides help over the telephone outside normal business hours to **accused in custody** at police lock-ups awaiting bail hearings. Services include giving legal advice and facilitating consent releases.

LSS contracts the **West Coast Prison Justice Society** to provide summary advice or, in some cases, legal representation for prisoners as required under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in situations where clients are unable to protect their own liberty interests in a prison setting.

Mental health law

LSS provides legal representation at review panels for financially eligible clients involuntarily detained under the Mental Health Act (through the Community Legal Assistance Society – CLAS) and at BC Review Board hearings for clients found unfit to stand trial or not criminally responsible for crimes because of a mental disorder (through CLAS or referrals to private lawyers).

LawLINE advice

Lawyers and paralegals provide brief legal services for various matters including Aboriginal law, consumer rights, criminal law, debt, employment, family law, health, housing, human rights, immigration law, and income security issues (welfare, Old Age Security, the Canada Pension Plan, etc.). Services range from legal advice or help with correspondence and documents, to making phone calls or writing letters on a client's behalf. This assistance is available to those who cannot access alternative legal services and who meet the LSS income test for advice services. Interpreters are provided for callers who do not speak English. As there is a high demand for this service, callers are advised they may have to wait a significant length of time to speak to someone. **(604) 408-2172** (Vancouver area); **1-866-577-2525** (toll free)

Legal information

People with low incomes who do not qualify for legal representation or advice services can still get legal information. The society provides this information over the telephone, in print, and on the Internet. All regional centres, several local agent offices, and all government agents provide clients with computer access to legal information on the Internet.

LawLINE

LawLINE staff provide information about a wide range of legal matters and direct people to other information or services that can help them solve their legal problems.

Publications

LSS has developed a number of publications about various aspects of the law. These are available at LSS regional centres and local agent offices, public libraries, and government agent offices. Some publications are produced in languages other than English.

Websites

- The [LSS website](#) has information about LSS, legal aid services, and regional offices, as well as electronic publications about various aspects of the law and information for lawyers.
- The [Family Law in British Columbia website](#) helps people understand and use the law to solve their family law problems. It includes publications and videos, self-help guides, fact sheets, clear definitions of legal terms, court forms, links, and other resources.
- [LawLINK](#) helps people find current, relevant, and easy-to-use legal information and self-help resources on the Internet. Public access computers featuring this website are available at LSS regional centres and a number of other locations (listed on the LSS website).

LIOWs

Legal Information Outreach Workers (LIOWs) refer people to resources and help them find information, understand court forms, and use LawLINK public access computers. They also give talks and workshops at community agencies to explain how to get legal aid services.

For further information on the above services, see the individual fact sheets listed under [Legal representation services and Legal information and advice services](#).