

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 1, 2017, 10:30 am

JUSTICE SYSTEM FACES CRISIS, SAY ALBERTA'S CROWN PROSECUTORS

EDMONTON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017 – Edmonton's Chief Crown Prosecutor yesterday directed in the Provincial Court that 15 separate criminal prosecutions be stayed, saying that her office does not have sufficient staff resources to take the charges to trial.

These prosecutions were for significant, provable offences. This is not the first of such stays. Including these latest, approximately 200 similar criminal cases have been stayed in the last two months as a means of managing Alberta Crown Prosecutors' overburdened caseloads.

"Alberta is failing to fund the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service (ACPS) at levels that adequately support the administration of justice across Alberta," said James Pickard, President of the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association (ACAA).

There are cumulative pressures driving the current crisis:

- Alberta's population has grown substantially, and both the number and severity of serious crimes as increased.
- The approved number of Crown Prosecutor positions in Alberta has not changed significantly from staffing levels set in 2006 – over a decade ago.
- In order to save money, this government has imposed a hiring freeze on the ACPS. As a result, 35 approved full time equivalent positions (FTEs) are currently vacant, at a time when at least 50 new FTEs are urgently needed.
- The Jordan decision at the Supreme Court of Canada in July 2016 set stricter and clearer timelines for criminal cases.
- The combined effect of short-staffed offices and new timelines are forcing Crown Prosecutors to abandon significant prosecutions to protect the most serious and violent crimes from dismissal due to delay.

Pickard stated: "The cumulative impact of these realities is that Crown Prosecutors are staying provable charges in order to focus severely strained resources on serious and violent crimes such as murders and aggravated assaults. The charges which are being stayed include impaired driving, assault, fraud, theft and weapons charges."

"Unless the Government of Alberta immediately begins hiring additional prosecutors to tackle the current backlog and address the pressures, more criminal prosecutions will have to be abandoned," said Pickard.

Since the *Jordan* decision, the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland have each announced new funding for additional prosecutors to assist with the case backlogs in their jurisdictions.

“Our members know that victims of crime and communities are significantly impacted when criminal charges are stayed,” said Pickard. “Our Association advised the Deputy Minister of Justice and the Minister of Justice in November 2016 that there were too few prosecutors to handle the increasing number of criminal charges. To date, no substantive action has been taken in response to our concerns. We believe action must be taken quickly to protect Alberta’s justice system.”

- 30 -

About the Alberta Crown Attorneys’ Association

The Alberta Crown Attorneys’ Association, founded in 1971, is incorporated under the *Societies Act*. Its members are Crown Prosecutors employed by the Government of Alberta.

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