



Police Accountability

There are many ways you can take action if you feel the police have not acted properly. Each different action plan has good and bad things about it. Going to court is expensive and takes a long time, but might get you money for injuries or other damage. Sending in a complaint is cheaper, but is less likely to pay compensation. Complaints can result in criminal charges or discipline for the police officer involved.

Using the Courts

Criminal Charges

Police officers and security guards must obey the law, just like regular citizens. If you want to lay criminal charges against a security officer, you can call the police. If you want to lay criminal charges against a police officer, you may be able to convince *Crown Counsel* to lay criminal charges. You will need a lawyer to help you with this process. Police complaints can also result in criminal charges.

Civil Suit

You can sue the police for hurting you or damaging your property, which may result in some money to help you replace what was damaged or pay you for your pain and suffering. This kind of lawsuit can be very expensive. You should consult a lawyer to help you understand if this approach would help you.

If you choose to sue the police, you can sue in British Columbia Supreme Court, or in Small Claims Court. Small Claims Court is easier to understand than Supreme Court, and is less expensive. Pivot Legal Society has a guide to suing in Small Claims Court that

can help you. The guide is available from Pivot Legal Society, 678 East Hastings Street, Vancouver, V6A 1R1 and on the internet at www.pivotlegal.org.

Complaint Processes

Police complaints are the cheapest and fastest way to take action if the police have acted improperly, but they can still take a long time to resolve. Complaints can result in criminal charges, firing, suspension or discipline for the police officer involved. Threats from police officers towards people who complain are very rare and completely illegal; if you are threatened for making a complaint, immediately call the BCCLA, the office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, or a lawyer.

To make a complaint, write a letter as soon as possible after the incident. Describe the incident as accurately and honestly as you can. Include the date, time, and place. Include the badge numbers or names of the officers involved if you know them; if you don't, give a description – the investigators should be able to find out who it was. At the end of your complaint letter, include the action you want the police to take.

Free Advice

For free legal advice, contact these organizations:

- Western Canada Society to Access Justice
1-877-762-6664 and/or 604-878-7400.
www.accessjustice.ca
- Pro Bono Law of B.C.
604-893-8932
<http://probononet.bc.ca>
- Lawyer Referral Service
604-687-3221 (\$25 plus tax for first half-hour)



Be sure to include your return address and phone number and keep a copy of your letter for reference. For more information on how to file a police complaint, contact the BCCLA and ask for a police complaint brochure or visit www.bccla.org to access the brochure on the web.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Complaints

Send complaints about the RCMP to:

The Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP

#102 – 7337 137th Street

Surrey, British Columbia

V3W 1A4

B.C. Municipal Police Complaints

Send complaints about Vancouver Police Department or other municipal (city) police in B.C. to:

The Office of the Police

Complaint Commissioner

#320 – 1111 Melville Street

Vancouver, British Columbia

V6E 3V6