

# NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association  
Friday, November 2, 2007  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUP CALLS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF BILL 39

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association is calling for the B.C. government to withdraw Bill 39, the *Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act*.

Section 9(1) of the existing B.C. *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act* provides that “the principle of representation by population be achieved”. Boundaries may diverge only up to 25% unless “very special circumstances” exist. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Commission tried to stay within that set of rules. Premier Campbell’s government proposes in Bill 39 to erode the right to vote of citizens in British Columbia by changing the rules by which riding boundaries are set and by dictating terms to the independent Commission.

BCCLA President Jason Gratl: “The Electoral Commission’s model is significantly closer to satisfying the one-person-one-vote principle than the Government proposal. The Association has heard nothing that could possibly justify infringing on voting rights.”

The Commission presented its preliminary report on August 15, 2007 and called for 81 ridings in B.C. for provincial elections, all but two of which fell within a plus or minus 25% range from the average. The two most northerly districts were to fall about 50% below the average.

In the Columbia-Kootenay, Thompson-Cariboo and North areas, Bill 39 guarantees a set number of seats, even though those areas do not merit that many on a representation by population basis. The total number of MLA’s under Bill C-39 is directed to increase from 79 to 87. B.C. elected 57 MLAs in 1979, increased that to 69 in 1986, 75 in 1991, and 79 in 2001. British Columbia currently has 36 MPs in the federal Parliament.

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association has stood firmly against erosion of equality of voting rights throughout its history. In the 1980’s, the BCCLA launched *Dixon v. Attorney General of B.C.*, a case that affirmed the constitutional principle requiring effective parity of voting power. If Bill 39 is not withdrawn, the BCCLA will sue the government to have the constitutional rights of British Columbians respected and protected.

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