



NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
September 22, 2009

For immediate release

Housing Minister reverses plan to arrest homeless

Vancouver, B.C. – According to recent media reports, B.C. Housing Minister Rich Coleman is reversing plans that he endorsed as recently as Monday to arrest homeless people who refuse to report to the nearest homeless shelter during inclement weather.

“Throwing people into prison because they are poor is bad policy, this reversal is the right decision,” says Robert Holmes, President of the BCCLA. “The Minister surely has been advised that this plan would not stand up to constitutional challenge. We congratulate his sober second look at this.”

On the weekend, the BCCLA had obtained internal ministry documents from an unnamed reliable source that outlined the controversial plan to arrest homeless people with force if necessary if they did not attend a homeless shelter, and shared them with the Globe and Mail. The BCCLA objected to the plan as set out in the documents, pointing out that the homeless would likely hide from police if such an initiative were put in place, hiding them from outreach workers as well.

“Last year, on thousands of occasions, individuals were turned away from emergency shelters because the shelters were full,” said Holmes. “The government ought properly to focus upon providing necessary social services to those most in need instead of thinking up ways of treating the poor like criminals. Especially in the context of this initiative taking place just in time for the Olympics, it cannot be held out as a showcase of compassion and caring.”

Vancouver has 1300 shelter spaces available in the cold/wet weather season. The last homeless count put Vancouver’s street homeless population at just over 1500 people at a minimum. The Housing Minister has not announced any plans to increase emergency shelter beds as part of his proposal.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Robert Holmes, President, (604) 838-6856
David Eby, Executive Director, (778) 865-7997

