

MANITOBA GOVERNMENT INACTION TO REDUCE WORKLOADS OF OVERBURDENED CROWN ATTORNEYS PUTS THE PUBLIC AT RISK

Manitoba Association of Crown Attorneys calls on the government to have meaningful negotiation to improve working conditions of Crown lawyers, enhance public safety

January 10, 2025 – Amidst rising crime rates in the province, the Manitoba Association of Crown Attorneys filed a grievance with the Government of Manitoba in April 2023 to address the dangerously heavy caseloads carried by Crown Attorneys. The grievance won't be heard by an arbitrator until October 2025. Meanwhile, the pressures placed upon Crown Attorneys in Winnipeg and Regional Prosecutions offices continue to mount. The delay puts the public at risk.

“This government has failed to take meaningful action to address the workload problem for Crown Attorneys in Manitoba,” MACA President Christian Vanderhooft said. “At the same time, the expectations put on prosecutors and complexity of the work done by them has never been more intense.”

The strain on Crown Attorneys is not only due to an increase in crime in the province, but is compounded by increasingly complicated cases, stricter timelines for hearing criminal matters and inadequate staffing, which leaves those working with insufficient time to prepare for court. Given advances in technology, Crown Attorneys are also dealing with an unprecedented volume of disclosure to review. Although the government, and its predecessors, have met with MACA to discuss these concerns, it has not taken tangible steps to resolve the issues that have given rise to the grievance.

With the impending roll out of body worn camera footage from RCMP officers, this disclosure volume will only increase workloads for prosecutors, particularly for Regional and Circuit Crowns.

“Eventually it becomes challenging to properly discharge your professional responsibilities,” said Vanderhooft. “If the government is committed to the administration of justice in this province, we can't leave this for an arbitrator to figure out. This government has said over and over again they want to be a listening government: it's time to listen to those on the frontlines of your criminal justice system.”

In 2024, Manitoba set a new record for homicides at 99, more than double the number recorded ten years ago, when Manitoba saw 45 homicides in 2014.

Manitoba has recently lost experienced Crown Attorneys to B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan. In most cases, departing Crown Attorneys have trained in the Manitoba Prosecution Service and have benefited from their significant experience here, but they can move to another province and get paid the same as the most senior Crown Attorneys in Manitoba, but with far less experience.

“If this government is serious about protecting Manitobans and their communities, it must commit to providing the support and resources needed to prosecute crime. If the province does not move on this, we will continue to lose experienced prosecutors to other provinces and push

the system past its limits,” Vanderhooft added. “We need leadership from the government to keep our streets safe. All Manitobans depend on it.”

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