



October 20, 2020

New Indigenous Court in Hazelton to Improve Delivery of Justice

VANCOUVER, B.C. - British Columbia's eighth Indigenous sentencing court will open in Hazelton in Spring of 2021.

Indigenous Courts currently operate in seven B.C. communities - New Westminster, Duncan, Kamloops, North Vancouver, Merritt, Williams Lake and Prince George. The Indigenous Court working group in Hazelton invited the Provincial Court to work with them to develop a court process that could help address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people involved in the criminal justice system.

As a result of their initiative, the court was involved in the process of consultation and planning with the local Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en Indigenous communities, First Nations Band representatives, Elders, Hereditary Chiefs, B.C.'s Ministry of Attorney General, judges, British Columbia Prosecution Service, the community of Hazelton, Smithers Community Corrections, Court Services, the B.C. First Nations Health Authority, lawyers, Legal Aid B.C., the Law Foundation of B.C., the B.C. Assembly of First Nations and local support services groups.

An Indigenous Court is a sentencing court. It provides an Indigenous perspective, based on a holistic and restorative approach to sentencing Indigenous persons who have acknowledged responsibility for their criminal offence(s). Local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have completed a program of orientation give advice on a healing plan. The healing plan may then be incorporated as part of a fit sentence for the Indigenous person who has pled guilty.

Today's announcement is a significant step in the ongoing process of community involvement in the creation of innovative solutions to improve the delivery of justice. The court will begin sitting monthly at the Hazelton courthouse.

Due to Covid-19 gathering restrictions, a virtual opening ceremony for the court will take place in early 2021. Further details to follow in due course.

Melissa Gillespie
Chief Judge
Provincial Court of British Columbia