



PROVINCIAL COURT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Message from the Chief Judge

**April 3, 2020**

The COVID-19 pandemic is presenting us all with challenges that have no precedent in our lifetimes. Like everyone else, the Court must find ways to meet its responsibilities while reducing the risk of spreading the virus.

To do this, we have transitioned to an “essential services model” that reduces the number of people physically in courthouses but provides essential services to those with urgent matters. In practice this has meant adjourning trials except those deemed urgent by a judge and conducting the hearings that do proceed by telephone and/or video conferencing.

We appreciate how important court matters are to the people affected by them, and how expensive and stressful they can be. We deeply regret the impact that limiting court services will have on everyone who has to wait longer for their “day in court”. But we must balance the imperative that courts remain open with the need to safeguard the health of court staff and court users.

We’re making difficult decisions every day as we finetune procedures to make them as safe, effective and efficient as possible. We are wrestling with issues related to use of technology for remote appearances, including legal requirements, system capacity, privacy concerns, and security considerations.

We are collaborating with others in the justice system – the BC courts, Ministry of the Attorney General, provincial and federal prosecution services, Legal Aid, private lawyers, corrections services, law enforcement agencies and public health officials - and their co-operation has been invaluable.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we work to improve the new procedures we’re implementing. We welcome your feedback. Together we’ll meet these challenges.

Melissa Gillespie  
Chief Judge  
Provincial Court of British Columbia