



Date: September 19, 2008 at 10:45 a.m.

Event: Civil Forfeiture Office – Two-Year Status Report

Check Against Delivery

- Thank you all for joining us this morning.
- To begin, I'm pleased to introduce Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu, whose department has become a valued partner of our civil forfeiture program.
- Today, I'm pleased to be here to mark another milestone in our civil forfeiture program.
- It's an innovative program that can only be described as a success...
- And today, I'm pleased to release two years' worth of proof (*Minister holds up report*).
- It summarizes two years of innovation and dedication by officers from Vancouver and across B.C...
- Two years of bad news for those who engage in unlawful activity...
- And two years of good news for the rest of us, with almost \$5 million forfeited and over \$1.1 million paid out to support community crime prevention and victim services.
- In mid-2006, our government established the Civil Forfeiture Office and reached out to build awareness of and support for its work among our police forces.
- From the outset, one goal was to make it as efficient and easy as possible for busy police officers to refer files that may be suitable for civil forfeiture action.
- The result: 166 referrals up to the end of June.
- Taking those forward, the office has worked closely with lawyers in the Ministry of Attorney General.
- And so far, every settlement or forfeiture has been settled on the terms laid out by the Civil Forfeiture Office.

- As a result, not only did the Civil Forfeiture Office become self-funding in 18 months – just half the time we gave it to do so.
- It's also begun paying good dividends for victims of crime and local crime prevention and remediation efforts.
- You may recall that earlier this year, we awarded \$500,000 to 27 programs in communities across B.C., supporting everything from restorative justice to the prevention of cyber-bullying among vulnerable young people.
- The future for civil forfeiture looks bright.
- As the report notes, we've yet to see a case go to a full trial in B.C.
- But that doesn't mean we're not prepared.
- We've listened to judges when presenting our pre-trial motions, and carefully considered the advice of our legal team.
- We've kept a keen eye on developments in Ontario – the only other province with an active civil forfeiture program.
- In turn, this spring, we clarified and tightened our forfeiture law in a number of ways.
- As well, we expanded the Act to deter unlawful activity before it results in death, injury or property damage.
- For example, we've enabled the forfeiture of vehicles where risky behaviour, like drunk-driving or street racing, is likely to cause serious injury or death.
- As a result, we expect the momentum we're seeing to keep building.
- That said, as the report notes, we're well aware that civil forfeiture is still relatively new for B.C. and in Canada generally.
- We recognize challenges are at hand, and that there may be setbacks in the future.
- But our goal is clear, our relationships are building, and we've taken important steps to make our strong legislation stronger.
- Our government is committed to this program, and whatever challenges arise, we'll continue to work through them.
- Still, I want to be clear that we don't regard civil forfeiture as a silver bullet.
- It's just one tool that is helping us to remove the profit motive from unlawful activity in British Columbia.

- When a vehicle or a large sum of cash is forfeited, it isn't available to further unlawful activity – and that may help us to stop that activity in its tracks.
- So we continue to focus on items used in ways that clearly threaten public safety.
- Today's case in point: the third vehicle forfeited to the Province.
- Vancouver Police found it carrying a concealed handgun in the busy downtown entertainment district.
- I want to thank Chief Chu and the VPD for working with us to take away from this type of activity, which presents very clear public safety concerns.
- With the continued, strong partnerships we're fostering with police and our legal team, I believe the results in this report are only the beginning.
- I look forward to seeing civil forfeiture undermine more unlawful activity, including gang activity, in British Columbia...
- And to seeing the fruits of that effort further the success of the program itself, and of the many worthwhile, local efforts like those we've been able to fund to date.
- *(Minister invites Chief Chu to say a few words.)*