

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**BC GOVERNMENT CANCELS FUTURE JOINT MEETINGS  
WITH ITS IN-HOUSE CIVIL LAWYERS OVER UNIONIZATION BID**

*After three decades of working collectively on workplace matters, the employer has abruptly ended further joint meetings with the BC Government Lawyers Association, which is headed for LRB to bargain collectively for government lawyers*

**Victoria, B.C. (December 5, 2022):** The Ministry of Attorney General, which directly employs some 350 civil lawyers, has told the BC Government Lawyers Association it will not schedule any more joint committee meetings with the BCGLA for the foreseeable future.

The move ends almost 30 years of regular cooperative meetings in which government representatives and BCGLA directors addressed workplace issues. The government's decision to cancel comes mere days after the association publicly [announced](#) it would seek the right to advocate for government lawyers in collective bargaining, in accordance with new provincial legislation passed this year.

Under Bill 10, the government's lawyers should be entitled to start negotiating their own contract, pay and working conditions like any other union, if they are able to get at least 55 percent of them to submit sign up cards. As mandated, the BCGLA has collected cards from 75 per cent of the civil lawyers who represent the provincial government in court, provide government with legal advice and draft government legislation.

However, a provision of the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* originally passed in 1973 prevents government lawyers from unionizing. The BCGLA is asking the LRB to rule that legislation a denial of the lawyers' right to freedom of association, as guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The BCGLA has also been separately planning legal action for years and is set to take the government to court in the new year. The ministry advised the association last week that their 30 years of regular, cooperative joint meetings would be unilaterally ended until further notice, referencing the litigation.

"The employer is citing our plan to take the government to court as the reason, which is odd because both sides have known about this impending court action for years, yet we kept discussing day-to-day work issues productively," said Gareth Morley, President of the BC Government Lawyers Association. "Suddenly, the litigation becomes a reason not to talk about business matters anymore. The government has refused to recognize the same bargaining status for us as for other government lawyers both in B.C and the rest of Canada for years, but continued to talk about the workplace. Things seem to be escalating for no good reason."

(more)

The exclusion of government lawyers from collective bargaining is something the BCGLA has been trying to change since 2013, culminating in a legal action that commenced in 2019, and set for hearing in February 2023.

“Labour matters are not discussed in joint committee with the employer, so why end our regular meetings?” adds Margo Foster, Secretary of the BCGLA. “There’s no good reason to cancel these sessions which are very productive for both sides. Our bid to bargain on behalf of government lawyers is a matter to be dealt with in an entirely different arena. Any litigation over labour issues will have no impact on day-to-day workplace matters.

“Even without the joint committee meetings, workplace issues will emerge as they typically do, but now there’s no process to deal with them effectively and efficiently. It’s really a step backward that need not happen, despite the differences of opinion we have on the matter of recognizing bargaining rights.”

### **About the BCGLA**

The BC Government Lawyers Association advocates for 350 government civil lawyers in matters of remuneration, benefits, conditions of employment and matters of professional interest relating to employment.

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*(Photo submitted: BCGLA directors Tara Callan (left) and Micah Weintraub count and verify union sign up cards. More than 75 per cent of the provincial government’s lawyers have signed up to bargain as a union.)*

Media contact:

Trevor Pancoust

[tpancoust@pacegroup.com](mailto:tpancoust@pacegroup.com)

778.386.0843