

About

 bccla.org/about/

The BC Civil Liberties Association was established in 1962 and is the oldest and most active civil liberties group in Canada. We are funded by the Law Foundation of B.C. and by citizens who believe in what we do.

Our mandate is to preserve, defend, maintain and extend civil liberties and human rights in Canada. We achieve our mandate through our Advocacy in Action, Public Policy, Community Education, and Justice programs.

The BCCLA is an autonomous, non-partisan charitable society. Though we strive to work cooperatively with other groups on common causes, we are unaffiliated with any other organization or political group. Our independence has been one of the BCCLA's enduring strengths for over 50 years.

Our Community Education Program

Informed and vigilant citizens are the key to protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. The BCCLA provides publications and leaflets on a range of topics at no charge to the public. These include the *Privacy Handbook*, *Rights Talk*, *The Arrest Handbook*, *Police Complaints*, *Drug Testing in the Workplace*, and the *Citizenship Handbook* offered in various languages to engage immigrants and students.

We offer a Speakers Bureau in which our staff and board members talk to students and community groups and we hold public events about civil liberties and human rights.

Our Advocacy in Action Program

We provide direct assistance to individuals who request information or have complaints about civil liberties violations by government agencies, employers and other organisations. We do all of this at no charge to the public. Common areas of work include police and privacy complaints, access to and protection of personal information, free speech and anti-oppression. While the BCCLA helps a diverse range of people, from citizens to businesses to other community agencies, complainants are frequently burdened with poverty, homelessness, addiction, discrimination, and physical or mental disabilities that limit their ability to self-advocate.

Our Public Policy Program

Over the years, the BCCLA has developed over 200 policy briefs, which serve as the principled cornerstones for our work. We meet with government and private sector officials to persuade them to change laws or policies that infringe on civil liberties and to develop new laws and policies that protect fundamental rights and freedoms. For example, our efforts have included playing a major role in advocating for human rights legislation, access-to-information and privacy legislation, while also resisting the more draconian anti-terrorism provisions. We are currently working to reform systems for accountability when there is a death of a citizen in police custody to ensure that civilians are responsible for investigating these deaths rather than police.

Our Justice Program

When all else fails, the BCCLA stands poised to challenge laws in the courts and over the years we have attracted the resources and *pro bono* legal talents to be successful at this. Since our inception, the BCCLA has always fought to preserve freedom of expression in Canada through strategic litigation, such as opposing book bans. Recently, the BCCLA sought an injunction prohibiting the Canadian Forces from transferring detainees into the custody of Afghan secret police due to the risk of torture. In addition, many people have been shocked to hear about the in-custody deaths of Frank Paul, Ian Bush and Robert Dziekanski. In 2008, the BCCLA participated in the public inquiry into the death of Frank Paul, a 47-year-old Mi'kmaq man dumped by Vancouver police in a downtown alley where he died of exposure. In 2009, the BCCLA participated in the taser inquiry led by Commissioner Tom Braidwood, which follows the BCCLA's demands for a moratorium on taser use. In 2012, the BCCLA was successful at the BC Supreme Court in *Carter v. Canada*, which challenged the laws restricting an individual's right to choose a death with dignity.

Our General Operations

In addition to our core program areas, we regularly have projects that are not covered by other funding or have urgent needs not included in the program budgets. We also require funding for general operations, which includes office management and administration. This basic infrastructure enables the BCCLA to offer its programs and services free of charge to all Canadians and it is a critical component of our budget. We consistently exceed Canadian Revenue Agency requirements for expenditure on our charitable activities each year because we keep our operating costs very low and we rely heavily on the expertise and dedication of our Board and volunteers who work tirelessly for civil liberties at no cost to the Association.