The Justice System

The Canadian justice system guarantees everyone due process under the law. Our judicial system is founded on the **presumption of innocence** in criminal matters, **meaning everyone is innocent until proven guilty.**

Canada's legal system is based on a heritage that includes the rule of law, freedom under the law, democratic principles and due process. Due process is the principle that the government must respect all the legal rights a person is entitled to under the law.

Scales of Justice, Vancouver Law Courts. The blindfolded Lady Justice symbolizes the impartial manner in which our laws are administered: blind to all considerations but the facts

Border guard with sniffer dog inspects the trunk of a car at the Canada-U.S.A. border

Canada is governed by an organized system of laws. These laws are the written rules intended to guide people in our society. They are made by elected representatives. The courts settle disputes and the police enforce the laws. The law in Canada applies to everyone, including judges, politicians and the police. Our laws are intended to provide order in society and a peaceful way to settle disputes, and to express the values and beliefs of Canadians.

(From Left to Right)

Jury benches

Ottawa police constable helping a young boy at the Aboriginal Day Flotilla

Prisons have an essential role in punishing criminals and deterring crime

COURTS

The Supreme Court of Canada is our country's highest court. The Federal Court of Canada deals with matters concerning the federal government. In most provinces there is an appeal court and a trial court, sometimes called the Court of Queen's Bench or the Supreme Court. There are also provincial courts for lesser offences, family courts, traffic courts and small claims courts for civil cases involving small sums of money.

POLICE

The police are there to keep people safe and to enforce the law. You can ask the police for help in all kinds of situations—if there's been an accident, if someone has stolen something from you, if you are a victim of assault, if you see a crime taking place or if someone you know has gone missing.

There are different types of police in Canada. There are provincial police forces in Ontario and Quebec and municipal police departments in all provinces. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) enforce federal laws throughout Canada, and serve as the provincial police in all provinces and territories except Ontario and Quebec, as well as in some municipalities. Remember, the police are there to help you.

You can also question the police about their service or conduct if you feel you need to. Almost all police forces in Canada have a process by which you can bring your concerns to the police and seek action.

GETTING LEGAL HELP

Lawyers can help you with legal problems and act for you in court. If you cannot pay for a lawyer, in most communities there are legal aid services available free of charge or at a low cost.