

ENDING VIOLENCE

Association of BC

INFORMATION UPDATE

FUNDED FAMILY JUSTICE 211 REPORT SERVICE

Section 211 of the Family Law Act authorizes courts to order reports that assess the needs of a child, the ability of a party to satisfy those needs and/or the views of a child. These reports help judges understand the parenting capacities of guardians and how the best interests of a child can be met.

Reports can only be ordered by a court, and are not made available routinely. Most reports are ordered by the Provincial Court, although the service receives a number of Supreme Court referrals each year as well. **There is no cost for these reports when provided through a Family Justice Centre.**

Reports generally fall into one of two categories:

- **Full Reports** that provide information regarding the needs of the child, views of the child, and the ability and willingness of the parents to meet the needs of the child. These reports include an overall summary and assessment of the information collected regarding the family.
- **Views of the Child Reports (VOCs)** that present a child's opinions, wishes and concerns and is non-evaluative. It is limited to the child's view only.

Occasionally, a judge requests a more directed report on some specific aspect of a child's life. The focus can be specified in the judicial instructions on the referral or can be included in the court order.

Addressing the Needs of the Family Justice System

Reports are ordered when people have not been able to agree on parenting arrangements. Receiving the objective report of an independent third party may calm emotions and ease concerns of the involved parties. In many cases, people are able to reach agreement after receiving a report.

In this way, reports help fulfill the intention of the Family Law Act to achieve dispute resolution away from the court system, lowering the number of cases where it is necessary for people to go through the courts.

Who Writes the Reports?

Family Justice report writers are specially trained Family Justice Counsellors employed by Family Justice Service Division. They have received accreditation through the Justice Institute of BC and Family Mediation Canada in addition to their educational degrees. Many have a background in social work, psychology, criminal justice or justice studies.

A small staff team are located across the province, including the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, the Southern Interior and Northern BC. Report writers travel to all parts of the province to prepare reports.

The team provides s. 211 reports for the entire province of British Columbia. They are a publicly funded program that receives direct referrals from the courts for both Full s.211 Reports and Views of the Child Reports.

How Long do Families Have to Wait to Obtain a Report?

Wait times for reports vary:

- Current wait time for a Full Report is six to nine months
- Views of the Child Reports are generally completed within two to three months after the referral is received.

The Report Service is unable to process ‘expedited’ or ‘updated’ reports on an urgent basis. To maintain their service commitment to all clients, they produce reports based on the date on which they receive the referral.

When a Full Report is not needed, lawyers and parents can request, and judges can order, a report focusing on a particular issue or issues. This will shorten the time needed to prepare the report and help reduce wait times.

The Impact of Long Wait Times

Wait times for obtaining reports can create delays in resolving family disputes. Children need their voices heard when issues arise. And cases going to trial that might have been settled by agreement if a report had been available mean lost opportunities for co-operative, rather than adversarial, parenting.

Information about BC’s Family Justice Report Service is available on the
Department of Justice Canada’s website at
<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/fjs-sjf/view-affic.asp?uid=164&search=>