

[Member Login](#)

[Contact](#)



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[About LIANS](#)

[Services](#)

[Standards](#)

[News](#)

[Resources](#)

[Home](#) → [Standards](#) → [Criminal Law Standards](#)

#1 - WITHDRAWAL AS COUNSEL

CRIMINAL LAW STANDARDS

[#1 - Withdrawal as
Counsel](#)

[#2 - Lawyers'
Competence](#)

[#3 - Defence
Obligations
Regarding
Disclosure](#)

STANDARD

General

1. A lawyer must not withdraw from representation of a client except with good cause.¹
2. A lawyer must withdraw from representing a client under the following circumstances: (1) they are discharged by the client; (2) the client persists in instructing the lawyer to act contrary to professional ethics; (3) the lawyer is instructed by the client to do something that is inconsistent with the lawyer's duty to the court; (4) the lawyer's continued representation of the client will lead to a breach of the Rules of Professional Conduct; or (5) the lawyer is not competent to handle the case.²
3. A lawyer must provide reasonable notice to the client of his or her intention to withdraw.³

Withdrawal for Non-Payment of Fees

4. A lawyer may withdraw because the client has not paid the agreed fee; however, a lawyer must not withdraw from representation of a client on the grounds of non-payment of fees, unless the client is given a reasonable opportunity to obtain another lawyer who will (1) either be able to secure an adjournment of the matter, or (2) be prepared to properly

represent the client on the trial date without adversely affecting his client's interests.⁴

Duties Upon Withdrawal

5. A lawyer must, upon his or her removal as counsel of record, inform the client in writing of the following: (1) that counsel has withdrawn from the case; (2) the reasons for the withdrawal, if any; and (3) if the matter was adjourned, the new date of the trial or hearing; or if the matter was not adjourned, that the client should expect that the trial or hearing will proceed on the currently-scheduled date and that the client should retain new counsel.⁵

6. A lawyer must cooperate with the successor lawyer in the transfer of the file so as to minimize expense and avoid prejudice to the client.⁶

7. Notwithstanding the existence of a lien, the lawyer must ensure that all documents and papers to which the client is entitled, including the Crown disclosure package is promptly delivered to the successor lawyer.

NOTES

1. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-1

2. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-7

3. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-1 and rule 3.7.3

4. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-5

5. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-4

6. NSBS, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.7-9

PRACTICE NOTES

Good Cause

“Good cause” will include those situations when the lawyer is usually entitled to withdraw, but must not necessarily do so. For

example, where there has been a loss of confidence between lawyer and client.

The following circumstances may constitute a breakdown in the solicitor-client relationship that may justify a lawyer's withdrawal from a case. The list is non-exhaustive: (1) when the client has deceived the lawyer; (2) when the client has committed dishonorable conduct in the course of the proceedings, e.g. committed perjury, obstruction of justice, intimidation of a justice participant, etc. (3) when the client has adopted a position solely to harass or injure another; (4) the client refuses to accept the lawyer's advice, where this is fundamental to their representation; or (5) the lawyer cannot obtain instructions satisfactory to the lawyer.

The lack of instructions satisfactory to the lawyer may include the absence of instructions. It may also include circumstances when the client has instructed the lawyer to enter a guilty plea so he or she may finalize the criminal process, despite the client maintaining their innocence.

If withdrawal is sought for an ethical reason, then the Court must grant the withdrawal: *R. v. Cunningham*, [2010 SCC 10](#) at para. 49.

Reasonable Notice to the Client

A lawyer must make reasonable efforts to notify the client in writing whenever possible of their intent to withdraw.¹ Whether the notice the lawyer has given the client is sufficient will depend on the circumstances of each case.

It is admittedly difficult—if not impossible—in some cases to properly notify the client in advance of a lawyer's intention to withdraw as counsel of record. Some clients are transient, with no fixed address. The lawyer must nevertheless do their best to inform the client. A letter sent by the lawyer to their client by registered mail to their last known address will likely meet the standard expected of the rule.

Timely notice may be achieved by the lawyer using other means to communicate with the client. For example, if the lawyer communicates with the client via text messaging, and that means of communication has proven reliable in the past, notice to the client may nevertheless be reasonable under those circumstances.

The underlying obvious reason to give as much notice as possible is to enable the client to have adequate time in which

to retain another lawyer. The lawyer's principal concern must be to protect the client's interests. The lawyer should also endeavor to notify the Crown, and the Court.

A lawyer should make reasonable efforts to ensure that the timing of the application for withdrawal is such that it does not (a) prejudice the client that he or she is placed at a disadvantage at a critical stage in the proceedings; (b) that the client has sufficient time to obtain and instruct new counsel; and (c) court time is not wasted.²

When the timing of the application is an issue, the Court is entitled to make enquiries of counsel: *R. v. Cunningham*, [2010 SCC 10](#) at para. 48.

If the Court enquires as to the reason for the withdrawal, and it is for an "ethical reason," as contemplated by *Cunningham* (as opposed to non-payment of fees), counsel must give an explanation to the Court that will not (1) violate solicitor-client privilege, and (2) not prejudice the client's interests. Arguably, advising the Court that the reasons for the withdrawal is for "ethical reasons" may prejudice the client's interests, because the Court may draw adverse inferences from the use of that phrase.

The best practice is likely to advise the Court that the reason for withdrawal has "nothing to do with the non-payment of fees," and is related to a reason that makes it necessary for counsel to withdraw, in order to "comply with professional obligations." If the Court insists on a more detailed explanation, counsel should clearly state that it may not be able of doing so without violating privilege.

Be aware of the recent decision of *R. v. Denny*, [2014 NSSC 334](#) at para. 22. This is a unique decision that seems to go further than the Supreme Court of Canada in *Cunningham*. In *Denny*, the Court insisted on conducting an in-camera enquiry to hear the circumstances of the breakdown. Regardless of whether the Court decides to hold an in camera hearing (which is highly unlikely), or simply requests the lawyer to specifically put their reasons for withdrawal on the record, the lawyer must be careful to never divulge privileged information or make representation against their client. See also: *Kaizer (Re)*, [2012 ONCA 838](#) at para. 44.

Although rare, there are cases where trial courts have refused counsel's application to withdraw even in the face of a breakdown in the solicitor client relationship (see *R. v. Johnson*,

[1973] B.C.J. No. 779 (B.C.C.A.)), or denying an accused an adjournment following their counsel withdrawing from the case (see: *R. v. McCormick*, [1993] [B.C.J. No. 971](#) (B.C.C.A.); *R. v. Smith*, [1989] O.J. No. 1818 (Ont. C.A.).

Withdrawal for Non-Payment of Fees

The Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Cunningham*, [2010 SCC 10](#) confirmed at paragraph 17 of its decision that a court does have the authority to refuse an application made by defence counsel to withdraw as counsel of record for non-payment of legal fees.³ Justice Rothstein held that the Court's exercise of its discretion to allow counsel's application to withdraw will be guided by the following legal principles:

“47 If counsel seeks to withdraw far enough in advance of any scheduled proceedings and an adjournment will not be necessary, then the court should allow the withdrawal. In this situation, there is no need for the court to enquire into counsel's reasons for seeking to withdraw or require counsel to continue to act.

48 Assuming that timing is an issue, the court is entitled to enquire further. Counsel may reveal that he or she seeks to withdraw for ethical reasons, non-payment of fees, or another specific reason (e.g. workload of counsel) if solicitor-client privilege is not engaged. Counsel seeking to withdraw for ethical reasons means that an issue has arisen in the solicitor-client relationship where it is now impossible for counsel to continue in good conscience to represent the accused. Counsel may cite "ethical reasons" as the reason for withdrawal if, for example, the accused is requesting that counsel act in violation of his or her professional obligations (see, e.g., Law Society of Upper Canada, r. 2.09(7)(b), (d); Law Society of Alberta, c. 14, r. 2; Law Society of British Columbia, c. 10, r. 1), or if the accused refuses to accept counsel's advice on an important trial issue (see, e.g., Law Society of Upper Canada, r. 2.09(2); Law Society of Alberta, c. 14, r. 1; Law Society of British Columbia, c. 10, r. 2). If the real reason for withdrawal is non-payment of legal fees, then counsel cannot represent to the court that he or she seeks to withdraw for "ethical reasons". However, in either the case of ethical reasons or non-payment of fees, the court must accept counsel's answer at face value and not enquire further so as to avoid trenching on potential issues of solicitor-client privilege.

49 If withdrawal is sought for an ethical reason, then the court must grant withdrawal (see Creasser, at p. 328, and

Deschamps, at para. 23). Where an ethical issue has arisen in the relationship, counsel may be required to withdraw in order to comply with his or her professional obligations. It would be inappropriate for a court to require counsel to continue to act when to do so would put him or her in violation of 00075369-1 5 professional responsibilities.

50 *If withdrawal is sought because of non-payment of legal fees, the court may exercise its discretion to refuse counsel's request. The court's order refusing counsel's request to withdraw may be enforced by the court's contempt power (Creasser, at p. 327). In exercising its discretion on the withdrawal request, the court should consider the following non-exhaustive list of factors:*

whether it is feasible for the accused to represent himself or herself;
other means of obtaining representation;
impact on the accused from delay in proceedings,
particularly if the accused is in custody;
conduct of counsel, e.g. if counsel gave reasonable notice to the accused to allow the accused to seek other means of representation, or if counsel sought leave of the court to withdraw at the earliest possible time;
impact on the Crown and any co-accused;
impact on complainants, witnesses and jurors;
fairness to defence counsel, including consideration of the expected length and complexity of the proceedings;
the history of the proceedings, e.g. if the accused has changed lawyers repeatedly.

As these factors are all independent of the solicitor-client relationship, there is no risk of violating solicitor-client privilege when engaging in this analysis. On the basis of these factors, the court must determine whether allowing withdrawal would cause serious harm to the administration of justice. If the answer is yes, withdrawal may be refused."

Many of the factors set out above in *Cunningham* have to do with timing. In order to avoid the potentially unenviable position of having the court deny counsel permission to withdraw on the basis for no-payment, it may be useful for lawyers to put in place certain practice safeguards.

The lawyer may consider acting for the client on the basis of a

limited retainer. This has the advantage of providing the client with a specific fee-for-service that may provide them with some legal advice, while not compromising their ability to pay. For example, lawyer may agree to act for the client for the purpose of obtaining and reviewing the Crown disclosure package, providing an opinion about the case, or appearing in Court for only one day. It is important that the lawyer advise the Court that they appear for their client for that appearance only, and to make it clear on the record that they may not necessarily be trial counsel.

If the lawyer decides they will act as counsel, they should fix a firm deadline for the payment of fees that will be satisfactory to the lawyer to continue. As the deadline approaches, the lawyer should notify their client that if they may seek to be removed as counsel for non-payment. Once the deadline has expired, the lawyer should immediately notify the client, and the Court of their intention to be removed as counsel and make that application well in advance of the trial.

The lawyer must appreciate that if they leave the matter of non-payment to a date too close to the trial/hearing date, the greater the likelihood the Court will not permit withdrawal.

The suspension or withdrawal of Legal Aid coverage by virtue of s. 19 of the *Legal Aid Act*, will likely constitute just cause to be removed as counsel. Section 19 of the *Legal Aid Act* states:

“Legal aid may be refused, suspended or withdrawn, as the case may be, or a certificate cancelled with regard to any person otherwise eligible when that person, without sufficient reason,

- (a) refuses to provide the information or documents required to study his application;*
- (b) refuses to provide the information required under this Act and by the regulations;*
- (c) refuses to exercise his legal rights and remedies;*
- (d) refuses to co-operate with the solicitor rendering professional services for him, in the manner that is normal and customary between a solicitor and his client;*
- (e) makes a false statement or conceals information in applying for legal aid;*
- (f) is charged for an offence the same as or similar to one for which he has been convicted previously;*
- (g) is receiving or has received an unreasonable total amount of legal aid; or*
- (h) is not ordinarily resident in one of the provinces of Canada. R.S., c. 252, s. 19.”*

Timing and reasonable notice to the client and the Court will continue to be paramount considerations for the lawyer applying to withdraw as counsel.

Duties Upon Withdrawal

The Courts have long recognized the common law right of a discharged lawyer to exercise a lien on documents in his or her possession; see: *R. v. Gladstone*, [1972] 2 O.R. 127 (Ont. C.A.). But there are exceptions. A Court may interfere in the exercise of the lien where a third party has an interest in the proceedings.⁴

If the lawyer has a right to a retaining lien, he or she should make reasonable efforts to settle the dispute with the client. If the dispute cannot be resolved in a timely manner, but the withholding of the client's file could potentially prejudice the client's interests, the lawyer should not take action to enforce the lien until the completion of the criminal proceedings.

The lawyer's professional duty to transfer the client's file to the successor lawyer should epitomize cooperation and generosity. The lawyer should promptly send the Crown disclosure package to the successor lawyer as soon as practicable after withdrawing from a case.

In the case of non-payment of fees, if the lawyer intends to forward the litigation work product to the successor lawyer, the lawyer should first obtain instructions from the client with respect to the delivery of the remainder of the client's file. Instructions should first be obtained concerning memoranda of law, privately obtained witness statements, legal briefs, and other litigation work product. An attitude that involves generosity and cooperation will go a long way to minimize any potential prejudice to the client.

In many cases, the Crown will not have a running inventory of all of the disclosure that forms part of a file. The lawyer should record those documents and exhibits that are transferred to the successor lawyer, and have a system in place will confirm that the transfer of disclosure materials to the successor lawyer is complete.

The successor lawyer is responsible for ensuring they have complete disclosure. In minor cases, this might be easily accomplished by the successor lawyer speaking with the assigned prosecutor. In more complex cases, it may be necessary for the successor lawyer to attend the Crown

Attorney's office and compare their file with the Crown's disclosure.

Some parts of the disclosure package may be subject to "controlled disclosure" and a corresponding undertaking to the Crown. The lawyer has a duty to ensure those materials are immediately returned to the Crown.

R. v. Dugan, 1994 Carswell Alta 492; 149 A.R. 146 (Alta. C.A.) is an example of the potential difficulty in a former solicitor not ensuring disclosure is passed on to the accused following his withdrawal from the case. The prosecutor had originally made full disclosure to the accused's defence lawyer, but he did not give the disclosure to the accused once he was removed as counsel of record. In addition, the withdrawing lawyer did not inform the Crown or the Court that the disclosure materials had not been passed on. The accused received a copy of his disclosure on the morning of the trial; the Court permitted him until the afternoon to review before commencing with the trial. He was convicted. The Court of Appeal nevertheless upheld the conviction, and said that as a point of practice that if the defence lawyer for some reason is not going to pass on the disclosure to the accused, the lawyer should at a minimum advise the prosecutor and the Court of that fact.

ENDNOTES

- ¹. Note that the Provincial Court Rules 3.1 and 3.2 require that notice be first served on the client and then filed with the Court.
- ². The draft Provincial Court practice direction respecting withdrawal of counsel states that the rationale for the requirement to give sufficient notice to the Court is "To prevent last minute withdrawals by counsel for non-payment of fees, or other reasons, such that the Court is unable to re-book, or use the court time for other matters."
- ³. *R. v. Cunningham*, [2010 SCC 10](#) at para. 17.
- ⁴. *R. v. Gladstone*, [1972] 2 O.R. 127 (Ont. C.A.).

RESOURCES

[Sample Clauses for Retainer Agreements: Withdrawal as Counsel](#)

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About LIANS

Services

Standards

News

Resources

Home → Standards → Criminal Law Standards

#2 - LAWYERS' COMPETENCE

CRIMINAL LAW STANDARDS

#1 - Withdrawal as
Counsel

#2 - Lawyers'
Competence

#3 - Defence
Obligations
Regarding
Disclosure

STANDARD

A lawyer must be competent to perform all legal services undertaken on behalf of a client¹. In the criminal law context, competence requires:

an objective assessment of whether the lawyer can competently represent the client on the specific matter, having regard to the seriousness of the charge(s) and the complexity of the matter, given the lawyer's experience, pre-existing caseload and available resources².

an ability to recognize potential legal, ethical and evidentiary issues³.

Commentary

The Rule concerning Competence in section 3.1 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, *Code of Professional Conduct*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012 and the more specific definitions of that term contained within rule 3.1-1 of the Code is a useful starting point to understanding Competence in the context of criminal practice. Experience of counsel is a significant factor in a lawyer's competence to undertake a matter. A lawyer must not undertake a matter without the

requisite skill gained by training and experience. See **rule 3.1-2** of the Code:

Commentary [6] *A lawyer must recognize a task for which the lawyer lacks competence and the disservice that would be done to the client by undertaking that task. If consulted about such a task, the lawyer should:*

- (a) decline to act;*
- (b) obtain the client's instructions to retain, consult or collaborate with a lawyer who is competent for that task; or*
- (c) obtain the client's consent for the lawyer to become competent without undue delay, risk or expense to the client.*

Experience guidelines are a useful starting point to determining whether counsel has sufficient experience.

Counsel can take on cases where they will require some training, as long as the client is advised about the time and expense that may be required⁴.

Complexity of the matter includes the form and manner of presentation of the evidence. In some cases this will require the lawyer to have a basic ability to understand specialized information such as financial, scientific (such as DNA), or industry-specific data, and computer literacy and equipment sufficient to allow the lawyer to work with electronic disclosure and evidence presentation. See, specifically, the PPS/police MOU on electronic disclosure.

In *R. v. Therrien*, [2005 BCSC 592](#), the Court observed:

37 *With those qualifications in mind, I will refer to three cases: Rose, Jonsson, and Hallstone Products. First, in both Rose and Jonsson, the court foreshadowed the eventual response to the claim, as advanced here, of lack of necessary computer skills by counsel. In Rose, Martin J. noted that electronic disclosure is a fact of life, and in relation to acquiring the skills necessary to deal with that development, he said at para. 14 that "it is probably now incumbent ... to get with the program". In Jonsson, the Crown made disclosure of its case on 12 CD-ROMs on which there were summaries of electronic interceptions. The defendant objected on the basis that his lawyer lacked the necessary skills to use a computer and thus could not access the information. As to the lack of computer skills on the part of counsel, Klebuc J. said at para. 14:*

... the day will soon come when the ability to operate a personal

computer and retrieve data stored on computer disks and related media by means of software programs designed for general public use will be a core competency requirement for counsel who wish to act in cases involving voluminous amounts of data.

Competence can involve cultural aspects⁵. Sometimes a client's cultural background can have a substantive effect on their rights to liberty and to a fair trial. For example, Indigenous people are disproportionately denied bail, and still serve longer sentences than non-Indigenous offenders⁶. As a result, when counsel have an Indigenous client they have a positive duty "to bring that individualized information before the court in every case, unless the offender expressly waives his right to have it considered"⁷. Similar consideration should be given to cultural elements that may affect moral culpability for the purpose of sentencing⁸.

Cultural background also has a substantive effect on the right to be tried by a jury of one's peers⁹.

Examining competency is a component in determining "ineffective assistance of counsel" in the appeal context, but the standards are not the same. Cases addressing ineffective assistance of counsel arguments in the criminal context can be a useful reference in understanding competence, but the standard for "competence" in the professional discipline context is different than the standard for a successful argument of ineffective assistance of counsel.

R. v. G. D. B., [2000] 1 S.C.R. 520, [2000 SCC 22](#) – Incompetence as a component of ineffective assistance:

26 *The approach to an ineffectiveness claim is explained in Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984), per O'Connor J. The reasons contain a performance component and a prejudice component. For an appeal to succeed, it must be established, first, that counsel's acts or omissions constituted incompetence and second, that a miscarriage of justice resulted.*

27 *Incompetence is determined by a reasonableness standard. The analysis proceeds upon a strong presumption that counsel's conduct fell within the wide range of reasonable professional assistance. The onus is on the appellant to establish the acts or omissions of counsel that are alleged not to have been the result of reasonable professional judgment. The wisdom of hindsight has no place in this assessment.*

28 *Miscarriages of justice may take many forms in this context. In some instances, counsel's performance may have resulted in procedural unfairness. In others, the reliability of the trial's result*

may have been compromised.

29 *In those cases where it is apparent that no prejudice has occurred, it will usually be undesirable for appellate courts to consider the performance component of the analysis. The object of an ineffectiveness claim is not to grade counsel's performance or professional conduct. The latter is left to the profession's self-governing body. If it is appropriate to dispose of an ineffectiveness claim on the ground of no prejudice having occurred, that is the course to follow (Strickland, supra, at p. 697).*

34 *Where, in the course of a trial, counsel makes a decision in good faith and in the best interests of his client, a court should not look behind it save only to prevent a miscarriage of justice.*

R. v. West, [2010 NSCA 16](#) – Standard of review for ineffective assistance:

[269] *One takes a two-step approach when assessing trial counsel's competence: first, the appellant must demonstrate that the conduct or omissions amount to incompetence, and second, that the incompetence resulted in a miscarriage of justice. As Major J., observed in B.(G.D.), supra, at para. 26-29, in most cases it is best to begin with an inquiry into the prejudice component. If the appellant cannot demonstrate prejudice resulting from the alleged ineffective assistance of counsel, it will be unnecessary to address the issue of the competence.*

Cases addressing ineffective assistance of counsel in the criminal context have commented on specific behavior that may fall below the standard expected of criminal counsel¹⁰. The impugned conduct will be directed to either particular failings that affect the verdict, or pervasive incompetence that undermine the trial process, or both¹¹. Examples include:

(i) Conducting trial while intoxicated – trial fairness [*R. v. Joannis* (1995), [102 C.C.C. \(3d\) 35](#) (Ont.C.A.), at para. 78];

(ii) Conducting trial while a true conflict of interest exists – trial fairness [*Joannis*, at para. 79];

(iii) Failing to advise client on challenge for cause in jury selection -- trial fairness [*Fraser*, at paras.57-78];

(iv) Failing to adhere to the rule in *Browne v. Dunn* – reliability of verdict [*R. v. Gardiner*, [2010 NBCA 46](#)];

(v) Failing to competently conduct a motion to adduce certain evidence – both [Fraser, at paras. 109-114.];

(vi) Failing to advise fully of the benefits/dangers associated with testifying/not testifying, particularly when relying on a defence that has a subjective component –both [Ross, at paras. 37-61.];

(vii) Failing to cross-examine any witness – both [Ross, at paras.58-61];

(viii) Fundamental lack of understanding of the law – trial fairness [Ross, at paras. 58-61];

(ix) Failing to investigate (including a failure to effectively pursue areas at Preliminary Inquiry) and prepare case – reliability of verdict [Fraser, at paras. 94-95];

(x) Failing to prepare witness for testimony – both [Ross, at paras.45, 58-61; Fraser, at paras. 105-107];

(xi) Failing to review new disclosure and advise client of particulars and options – both [Fraser, at paras. 93, 116-119];

(xii) Failing review all evidence of witness, and then failing to call them – reliability of verdict [Fraser, at paras. 84-93, 97-104];

(xiii) The cumulation of failures may affect the verdict [*R. v. J.B.*, [2011 ONCA 404](#)];

(xiv) Failure to advise of possible defences or consequences of a guilty plea – both (though it is unsettled about whether the failure to advise of collateral or administrative consequences constitutes incompetence – *R. v. D.B.*, 2009 CarswellOnt 2028; *R. v. Shiwrashad*, [2015 ONCA 577](#)) [*R. v. S.(C.)*, 2010 ONSC 497]

It is critical for counsel to recognize that competence will not be measured by a microscopic examination, or “forensic autopsy”¹² of counsel’s performance. To do so would discourage the duty of counsel to fearlessly and vigorously defend their clients¹³.

Likewise, counsel are entrusted to act independently when they take carriage of a file. They are not the mouthpiece of their client. Their independent judgment includes making strategic decisions, the extent of cross-examination, etc. Advancing any and all objections, making any and all applications that come to mind, regardless of consideration of chances of success, or

effect on other arguments or defences advanced, are the hallmark of incompetence¹⁴. See also [American Bar Association Criminal Justice Standards for the Defense Function](#):

Standard 4-5.2: Control and Direction of the Case

(a) *Certain decisions relating to the conduct of the case are for the accused; others are for defense counsel. Determining whether a decision is ultimately to be made by the client or by counsel is highly contextual, and counsel should give great weight to strongly held views of a competent client regarding decisions of all kinds.*

(b) *The decisions ultimately to be made by a competent client, after full consultation with defense counsel, include:*

(i) whether to proceed without counsel;

(ii) what pleas to enter;

(iii) whether to accept a plea offer;

(iv) whether to cooperate with or provide substantial assistance to the government;

(v) whether to waive jury trial;

(vi) whether to testify in his or her own behalf;

(vii) whether to speak at sentencing;

(viii) whether to appeal; and

(ix) any other decision that has been determined in the jurisdiction to belong to the client.

(c) *If defense counsel has a good faith doubt regarding the client's competence to make important decisions, counsel should consider seeking an expert evaluation from a mental health professional, within the protection of confidentiality and privilege rules if applicable.*

(d) *Strategic and tactical decisions should be made by defense counsel, after consultation with the client where feasible and appropriate. Such decisions include how to pursue plea negotiations, how to craft and respond to motions and, at hearing or trial, what witnesses to call, whether and how to*

conduct cross-examination, what jurors to accept or strike, what motions and objections should be made, what stipulations if any to agree to, and what and how evidence should be introduced.

(e) *If a disagreement on a significant matter arises between defense counsel and the client, and counsel resolves it differently than the client prefers, defense counsel should consider memorializing the disagreement and its resolution, showing that record to the client, and preserving it in the file.*

Notes

1. This standard is also applicable to limited scope retainers. The challenges of such retainers for providing competent service are many. Please refer to [Law Office Management Standard #7: Limited Scope Retainers](#)

2. “The effectiveness of counsel is to be evaluated on an objective standard through the eyes of a reasonable person such that all an accused can expect of his or her defence counsel is a level of competence based on a standard of reasonableness. In other words, the lawyer is ‘required to bring reasonable care, skill and knowledge to the performance of the professional service which he has undertaken.’ *Central Trust Co. v. Rafuse* [1986], [2 S.C.R. 147](#) at para. 57.” (*R. v. Fraser*, [2011 NSCA 70](#), at para. 80); also see: *R. v. West*, [2010 NSCA 16](#) at para 268; *R. v. G.D.B.*, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 520, [2000 SCC 22](#) at para. 27; Law Society of Upper Canada, “[Entry Level Barrister Competencies](#)”

3. *R. v. Ross*, [2012 NSCA 56](#), at paras. 38-42, 58 (**legal**); *R. v. Joannis* (1995), [102 C.C.C. \(3d\) 35](#) (Ont.C.A.), at para. 79 (**ethical**); *R. v. Delisle* (1999), [133 C.C.C. \(3d\) 541](#) (Que.C.A.), at para. 14 (**ethical**); *Gardiner v. R.*, [2010 NBCA 46](#), at paras. 8-10, 23, 29 (**evidentiary**).

4. Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012, rule 3.1-2, commentary [1]-[6].

5. This is not a defined term. In the Society’s Equity Portal there is good material – see [Cultural competence: An essential skill in an increasingly diverse world – practicePRO](#)

6. *R. v. Gladue* [1999], [1 S.C.R. 688](#), para. 65; *R. v. Ipeelee*, [2012 SCC 13](#), para. 61.

7. *Ipeelee*, para. 60.

8. *R. v. X.*, [2013 NSPC 127](#).

9. *R. v. Parks* (1993), [84 C.C.C. \(3d\) 353](#) (Ont.C.A.); leave refused, [1994] 1 S.C.R. x.

10. See *R. v. Furtado*, [2006 CanLII 32992](#), 43 CR (6th) 305 (ONSC), at para. 74, for a comprehensive review of ineffective assistance of counsel first principles.

11. *Ross*, (see note 3) at para. 33.

12. *Joanisse*, at para. 68.

13. *Ibid.*, at para. 69.

14. *Furtado* (see note 10), at para. 74(19),(25).

References

[American Bar Association Criminal Justice Standards](#)

[Nova Scotia Provincial Court Rules](#)

[Nova Scotia Supreme Court Rules](#)

[Nova Scotia Supreme Court Criminal Forms](#)

[Nova Scotia Supreme Court Criminal Pre-Trial Conference Form](#)

[Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service – Crown Attorney’s Manual](#)

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ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

About LIANS

Services

Standards

News

Resources

Home → Standards → Criminal Law Standards

#3 - DEFENCE OBLIGATIONS REGARDING DISCLOSURE

CRIMINAL LAW STANDARDS

#1 - Withdrawal as
Counsel

#2 - Lawyers'
Competence

#3 - Defence
Obligations
Regarding
Disclosure

STANDARD

Once retained, Defence Counsel must obtain and review adequate Crown disclosure and review it with the client to permit them to obtain instructions from the client and to effectively represent the client.¹

Commentary

General

[1] The Crown has an obligation to disclose all relevant non-privileged information in its control or possession to the Accused which permits an evaluation of the strength or weaknesses in the Crown's case and to allow an Accused to evaluate whether further investigation is warranted.²

[2] Defence Counsel may also refer to the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service policy document entitled "Disclosure By The Crown in Criminal Cases". (November 20, 2013)

Retainer³

[3] Retainers can be in writing or a retainer may be established through a request for limited or summary representation.⁴ The

service requested may be limited or general in scope.⁵ The service may be *pro bono* or for an agreed upon fee. In any case, once the solicitor-client relationship has been established, the retainer is complete.⁶

[4] As part of the service provided, Defence Counsel provide their legal opinions.⁷ They do so by way of advice to their clients. It is then for the client to provide instructions based upon that advice. It is not unusual for Defence Counsel to differ in their interpretations of disclosure and it is not uncommon for clients to disagree with that interpretation. This should not dissuade Defence Counsel from providing their opinions respectfully and comprehensively.⁸

[5] Where a client's instructions conflict with the Defence Counsel's advice, they must not compromise the client's position even though the conflict will result in the termination of the retainer, and a request to be removed as counsel of record.⁹ Defence Counsel should consider how the advice provided and how the instructions may be affected by any equity-seeking community (e.g. Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, Francophone, Immigrant, Persons with Disabilities, LGBTQ, or clients from any other racialized or Indigenous communities) to which they may belong.¹⁰

Adequate Disclosure

[6] What is adequate disclosure may not always be apparent. Depending upon circumstances and client's instructions, the review might be a cursory review only. Similarly, a client is always at liberty to expressly instruct Defence Counsel to proceed without reviewing full Crown disclosure, although in such cases, wherever possible Defence counsel should strongly consider obtaining those instructions in writing. If a client wishes to enter a guilty plea, Defence Counsel's review obligation might not be as rigorous as when the client wishes advice on possible defences, shortcomings in the Crown's case or possible Charter arguments.¹¹

[7] Obtaining Crown disclosure is a process and may often involve multiple requests for further disclosure.¹² It may include refusal by the Crown to provide requested information. It might also include applications to the Court to require the Crown to provide information.¹³ Defence Counsel should provide legal advice about the information sought and, if appropriate to do so, obtain instructions to seek the disclosure.¹⁴

[8] Defence Counsel must try to be alert to inadequate

disclosure and the need to advise a client when and if further disclosure is required to provide effective representation.¹⁵

Effective Representation Guilty Plea¹⁶

[9] Even where a client acknowledges guilt and provides instructions to plead guilty to some, all or included offences, Defence Counsel must review adequate disclosure with their client to permit advice that there is admissible evidence of all essential elements of the offence(s) and that no defence is apparent.¹⁷

[10] Sometimes the client wishes to instruct Defence Counsel that they wish to plead guilty before full disclosure has been made. So long as the client is reasonably well-informed, properly instructs them, confirms those instructions on the record, and the s. 606(1.1) of the Criminal Code inquiry is confirmed by the client on the record¹⁸, Defence Counsel may accept instructions that the client wishes to plead guilty and to represent the client accordingly. Written instructions are strongly recommended in such cases.¹⁹

Advice of Possible Defences

[11] Where the client is seeking a more in-depth opinion, Defence Counsel should make a detailed investigation of the evidence outlines in the disclosure and, if required request the additional disclosure or a closer review of the evidence outlined in the disclosure. In that case, Defence Counsel must advise of the limitations and constraints of such an inquiry, the time and expense of that inquiry and then to seek instructions accordingly.²⁰

[12] Once Defence Counsel believes adequate disclosure has been reviewed, the opinion should be, wherever possible, in writing and any caveats or limitations should be included in that opinion. This is especially true if the client is providing instructions containing waivers, direction concerning procedure or guilty plea.²¹

Duty to the Client

[13] Defence Counsel owes a duty to the client to be honest, ethical and candid. It will not always be possible to give definitive answers to client enquiries with available disclosure or due to the nature of the case. If further disclosure might be of assistance, Defence Counsel must identify that and advise the client accordingly.²²

[14] It is always open to the client at any time, expressly to waive the requirement for full disclosure or to limit the requirement for full review of further disclosure. In those circumstances Defence Counsel ought to take those instructions in writing and with the confirmation acknowledged by the client that Defence Counsel has advised of the benefits in obtaining further and better disclosure.²³

[15] Similarly, it is open to the client to expressly waive any inquiry into possible Charter arguments; but Defence Counsel ought to take those instructions in writing and with the confirmation acknowledged by the client that Defence Counsel has advised them of the possible Charter issues.²⁴

[16] Within the disclosure requirement is the requirement that Defence Counsel seek instructions from their client so they understand the client's expectations. Defence Counsel should ensure that the client understands how the obtaining full disclosure and reviewing it with the client is integral to the service being provided and any limitations therewith.²⁵

Duty to Court

[17] Defence Counsel owes a duty of candour to the Court. It is always proper for Defence Counsel to respectfully advocate their client's instructions. It is never proper to intentionally misrepresent their client's position to the Court. Unless disclosure has been adequately made by the Crown to the Accused, Defence Counsel should seek judicial intervention as forcefully as is possible in the circumstances, whether by way of a *Stinchcombe* application or by other legal means to require the provision of the information necessary to permit an informed election or plea to be made by the client.²⁶

Duty to Other Counsel

[18] Defence Counsel owes a duty to colleagues to be respectful. Lawyers often disagree but there is no need to be disagreeable. This is especially true between Crown and Defence Counsel. Crown disclosure may be provided to Defence Counsel with limitations concerning its use or dissemination. Unless those limitations interfere with representation of the client, they should be followed. Otherwise Defence Counsel should not agree to them. Defence Counsel should only agree to limit their ability to provide the disclosure received to their client if it does not interfere with their client's right to make full answer and defence.²⁷

[19] Defence Counsel is not restrained from spirited advocacy. This is especially true concerning the need for adequate disclosure. It is the cornerstone of effective representation and it is needed to make full answer and defence.²⁸

Duty to the Public

[20] All lawyers have a duty to act honourably and ethically. Defence Counsel should refuse to accept instructions they regard as inappropriate. Disclosure often contains names, addresses and contact information of members of the police and other citizens, including witnesses. Defence Counsel must be on guard that these judicial participants do not become vulnerable to personal attacks or unwarranted interference.²⁹

[21] Crown disclosure is confidential information and Defence Counsel must not permit it to be improperly distributed, disseminated or made public.³⁰ Crown disclosure is made to enable an Accused to make full answer and defence only but remains confidential and also remains the property of the Crown. Defence Counsel receipt of disclosure is always subject to an implied undertaking respecting its use in the absence of an express undertaking.³¹

Third Party Applications

[22] This standard is not meant to apply to Applications for Third Party Records. These records are not usually in the possession of the Crown and are not subject to the general rules governing disclosure.³²

Defence Disclosure Obligations

[23] This standard is not intended to address the defence disclosure obligations. For a guide to these obligations, the reader should refer to the decision of *R. v. Murray*³³ and the paper of D. Murray Brown.³⁴

[24] Clearly, when Defence Counsel come into possession of physical evidence, some consideration should be made to whether Defence Counsel must provide the evidence to Crown.³⁵ Defence Counsel should refer to Chapter 5.1-2A and the Commentary references [1]-[6] of the Code of Professional Conduct in such instances.

[25] Also, Defence Counsel should keep in mind that certain kinds of information must or should be disclosed to the Crown. If a client instructs Defence Counsel that he has an “alibi”

defence, failure to give notice of this defence will prejudice the accused.³⁶ In addition, expert evidence is governed by the disclosure obligations under s. 657.3(3) of the Criminal Code. For this reason, clear instructions must be sought from the Accused and those instructions ought to be properly documented.

[26] *R. v. Sandeson* [2017]NSJ 335 (Arnold J) concerns the situation where information obtained by a private investigator hired by Defence and disclosed by the investigator to Police may be used by the Crown.

Inadvertant Disclosure

[27] In the instance where Defence Counsel receives disclosure determined to be inadvertent, Defence Counsel must not reveal that information to their client, must immediately advise Crown Counsel of the error and deal with the information as requested by Crown Counsel.³⁷ Examples of inadvertent disclosure are names of Confidential Informants³⁸ or personal information of vulnerable witnesses.

[28] Receipt by Defence Counsel of inadvertent disclosure is not an automatic disqualification from representing the client and does not amount to a waiver of privilege (e.g Confidential Informant privilege.³⁹ As well, Defence Counsel should refer to paragraph [21] above.

Notes

*Crown's duty to disclose to the Accused involves different considerations and is dealt with by way of standards internal to PPS (Can) & PPS (NS). See also *R. v. Hennessey* [2013] NJ No 165 (NL Sup Ct)

1. See generally section 3.1 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, *Code of Professional Conduct*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012. See also Criminal law Standard #2: *Lawyers' Competence*
2. See *R. v. REM* [2011] NSJ No 24 (NSCA); *R. v. Dixon*, [1998] *1 SCR 244*
3. See Commentary in Chapter 1 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, *Code of Professional Conduct*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
4. Ibid

5. See Limited Scope Retainers, rule 3.1-1A in the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
6. See *NSBS v. Meagher* (2012)
7. Paragraph 30(iv) of decision of Saunders JA in *R. v. Fraser* [2011] [NSJ No. 400 \(NSCA\)](#); contrast this decision with the decision of Saunders JA in *R. v. Hobbs* [1022] NSJ No 335 (NSCA) dismissing a complaint of ineffective representation; See also the decision of Oland JA in *R. v. Dugas* [2012] [NSJ No 507 \(NSCA\)](#)
8. See *R. v. JB* [2011] [ONCA 404](#); *R. v. Ross* [2012] [NSJ 283 \(NSCA\)](#)
9. See Commentary [3] of rule 3.2-2 and section 3.7 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
10. See general guidance in the decision of Derrick PCJ in *R. v. X* [2014] NSJ No. 609
11. See Criminal Law Standard #4: Withdrawal of Guilty Plea; *R. v. Malik* [2014] OJ No 355 (ONSC). Also see *R. v Symonds*, [2018 NSCA 34 \(CanLII\)](#)
12. *R. v. Stinchcombe* [1991] [SCJ No 83 \(SCC\)](#)
13. Ibid
14. See *R. v. CS* [2010] [ONCJ 497](#); *R. v. Pena* [1997] BCJ No 1404
15. *R. v. Fraser* [2011] [NSJ No. 400 \(NSCA\)](#) (note 7)
16. Supra note 9
17. Supra note 9
18. See Derrick J in *R. v. Buchanan* [2016] NSJ No 283 (NS Prov Ct); *R. v. Moser* [2002] [OJ No 552 \(SCJ\)](#)
19. See Commentary [6] and [8] for rule 3.1-2 and Commentary [3] and [5(f)] of rule 3.2-1 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
20. See rule 3.2-2 and section 3.6 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
21. Supra note 9
22. See generally section 3.1 and 3.2 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.

23. Ibid
24. See *R. v. Allison* [2016] NSJ No 291 (NSSC) especially that the waiver must be “informed”
25. Supra note 9
26. See section 5.1 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
27. Ibid
28. Ibid
29. rule 5.1-2 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012.
30. Ibid
31. See *DP v. Wagg* (2004) [71 OR \(3d\) 229 \(Ont CA\)](#); *R. v. Basi*, [2011 BCSC 314](#); *R. v. Mossaddad*, [2017 ONSC 5520](#); *R. v. Carter*, [2018 ONSC 1272](#).
32. See ss. 276-276.4 and ss. 278.1-278.9 of the Criminal Code. These sections govern the limitations upon adducing evidence of prior sexual conduct and the requirements, in order for an accused to access third party records.
33. *R. v. Murray*, [2000 CanLII 22631 \(Ont SC\)](#)
34. See Recent Developments in Disclosure: A Turn for the Defence, D. Murray Brown QC, December 2000; See also
35. Ibid
36. See *R. v. Young* [1990] [NSJ No. 224 \(NSCA\)](#), MacDonald JA:

"In the present case and, as I have already mentioned, neither Mr. Young nor Mr. Cullen gave advance notice that alibi evidence was going to be led. Their failure to do so went to the weight to be given such evidence and nothing more."

37. *R. v. Nguyen* [2015] AJ 1157 (ABQB); *R. v. Clarke* [2014] NSJ No. 575 (Coady J); *Derrick v. AG Canada* [2003] NSSC 104 (Goodfellow J); *R. v. Mohammed* [2008] OJ No. 5162. See also *R. v. Way* [2014] NSJ No. 254 (Arnold J) See also *DP v. Wagg*, [2004] [71 OR \(3d\) 229 \(Ont CA\)](#) where the issue to be determined involved proposed use of Crown materials in a civil case which followed the Criminal case.

38. Ibid

39. Ibid.

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#4 - WITHDRAWAL OF GUILTY PLEA

STANDARD

A lawyer who accepts instructions to bring a motion to withdraw a guilty plea must be satisfied following independent investigation¹ that there is a sufficient basis to conclude that the plea was either involuntary, equivocal or uninformed, or that the interests of justice are otherwise such² that it would be unjust to maintain the plea³.

NOTES

Counsel should be fearless in seeking to undo unjust or wrong guilty pleas. They occur. But, with the procedural safeguards afforded to all accused persons, the standard for withdrawing a guilty plea is intentionally high. Reputations of former counsel may be at stake. Your client's reasons for seeking to withdraw the plea will be viewed with skepticism. There are procedural requirements to consider, such as waiver of solicitor-client privilege, filing proper documents in the proper court, and potentially marshalling expert evidence.

Anecdotally, there is no single, uniform practice at present, and the Civil Procedure Rules and Provincial Court Rules provide no guidelines. Some courts and counsel have incorrectly assumed the matter to be pro forma. The required motion, however, carefully balances the proper functioning of the system and maintaining respect for the administration of justice with the overall need to prevent miscarriages of justice. It is, therefore, extremely important to consider the ethical, procedural, legal and practical factors when advising your client on whether to make the motion, advising of chances of success, and litigating.

The importance of your ethical obligations cannot be stressed enough when you are considering a motion to withdraw the guilty plea of a client who was represented by counsel at the time. The admonition in *R. v. Elliott* bears special attention:

"I consider it most unfortunate that any counsel, carried away by his enthusiastic support of his client's cause, should permit himself, by reason of his client's instructions, to make allegations inferring unjust conduct on the part of the Court, or unprofessional conduct on the part of brother solicitors without first satisfying himself by personal investigations or inquiries that some foundation, apart from his client's instructions, existed for making such allegations. His duty to

his client does not absolve a solicitor from heeding his duty to the Court and to his fellow solicitors."⁴

1. The Test

The accused bears the "heavy burden" of demonstrating that the guilty plea should be set aside. It may be misleading or unhelpful to use terms such as "balance of probabilities", or other traditional standards, in assessing the burden on the client here. Some courts have said that there must be "convincing evidence"⁵ that the plea was invalid. There will be a strong presumption of a valid plea when it is taken in open court, particularly where the trial judge undertakes the [s.606\(1.1\) Code](#) inquiry⁶. When your client was represented by counsel when the pleas were accepted, withdrawal of the guilty plea will be "almost insurmountable"⁷.

The decision to allow that the plea be withdrawn is discretionary, and will only follow where a Court concludes that there is "valid reason" to do so such that it would be unjust to maintain the plea. Therefore, generally, the accused must show that the guilty plea was either involuntary, equivocal and/or uninformed. Exceptional circumstances may also merit setting aside the plea, even where the general test cannot be met⁸.

(i) Involuntary

A voluntary plea involves a conscious, volitional choice, for reasons that the accused regards as appropriate at the time. A plea entered in open court will be presumed to be voluntary⁹.

Several factors may affect this: undue pressure (external); abusive plea bargaining; being under the influence of alcohol and/or drug at the time of the plea; mental health issues¹⁰. Rarely will internal pressure or anxiety suffice to invalidate the plea¹¹.

When alleging alcohol, drugs or mental health issues as invalidating the plea, medical evidence will be required. Either influence must remove the ability to make the volitional choice. In the case of questions regarding cognitive capacity, the test for a valid plea is the same as fitness to stand trial – limited cognitive capacity. There is no need for the accused to have the capacity to make a wise choice¹².

Pressure to plead guilty must be of such a magnitude that it overrode the choice of the accused, and that overridden choice was consistent with assertions of innocence¹³.

Pressure to plead guilty from deals made on the Courthouse steps is common and generally insufficient to invalidate the plea¹⁴.

(ii) Equivocal

The accused must plead guilty free from uncertainty, qualification, or confusion. Alcoholic blackout of the facts surrounding the offence will generally not suffice to render the plea equivocal¹⁵. The plea in open court, especially when represented by (experienced) counsel, with an agreement to the facts and chance to speak to the matter, all favour the conclusion that a plea was unequivocal¹⁶.

Experience of both counsel and the accused will factor into this part of the inquiry¹⁷. A disagreement with facts other than the essential elements will not render the plea involuntary or equivocal¹⁸.

(iii) Uninformed

An accused must have a sufficient understanding of the nature of the charges, the facts alleged, whether those facts give rise to a valid defence, the effect of the plea, and the consequences of the plea¹⁹. Consequences can include the effect of the sentence on immigration status²⁰, or on one's driving suspension under provincial legislation²¹.

In circumstances where an accused is unaware of "legally relevant collateral consequences"²² of conviction and sentence -- one which bears on sufficiently serious legal issues for the accused²³ -- the plea will be uninformed. If such a claim is accepted as credible, an accused must then establish that they would have either: (1) opted for a trial and pleaded not guilty, or (2) pleaded guilty, but with different conditions²⁴. A court will assess the veracity of this subjective assertion by looking to objective, contemporaneous evidence²⁵. There will be no requirement that the accused demonstrate an arguable defence; nor, a requirement to establish ineffective assistance of counsel -- it is the misinformation, and not its source, that drives the prejudice inquiry²⁶.

Language difficulties arise from time to time. An accused person has to be able to follow the proceedings and understand what s/he is pleading guilty to, as well as the legal consequences. Cases which have resulted in successful motions due to language problems include:

- (a)** Where it was later discovered that an interpreter provided an incorrect translation of the law of being a party to a crime (by presence at the scene) and the accused would have otherwise pleaded not guilty²⁷;
- (b)** Where, even with counsel, the accused did not have a sufficient understanding of English to follow the proceedings. The applicant provided the Court with an independent language proficiency test to substantiate his claim. The Court concluded that the accused's s.14 Charter right to an interpreter was violated and ordered a withdrawal of the guilty plea as a remedy²⁸.

Be aware, though, that such claims will generally require credibility assessments, and may involve contradictory evidence from counsel who represented the accused at the guilty plea²⁹.

Again, the experience of counsel and the accused with criminal law will factor into this aspect. The greater counsel's experience, the greater the inference counsel discharged his/her duties thoroughly and professionally; and, that the accused was aware of the charges, facts, effect and consequences of the plea. The accused need not know the exact sentence s/he will receive, or course -- just the risk of various available sentences, due to the nature of the charges and the plea³⁰.

The fact that an accused feels s/he has a defence, but pleads guilty with full knowledge of this, will not invalidate the plea. The guilty plea relieves the Crown of its burden and removes certain procedural rights of the accused³¹.

(iv) The Interests of Justice Otherwise Merit Withdrawal of the Guilty Plea

In rare and exceptional circumstances, the requisites for a valid plea are undisturbed, but the interests of justice require that the plea be set aside. This contemplates situations where the factual innocence can be established, sometimes from new disclosure, often revealed years later. Such instances include:

- (a)** where unrelated investigations, DNA, etc. lead to the conclusion that another person

committed the offence(s)³²;

(b) where commissioned inquiries lead to the conclusion of systemic, fatal blunders in forensic investigations³³;

(c) where police have falsified or fabricated evidence in the course of their investigations³⁴; or,

(d) where the person is factually innocent, but the “false guilty plea” is prompted by “purely pragmatic reasons, such as the offer of a deep discount on penalty, the prospect of release from custody, the inability to pay a lawyer for a trial, or other factors unrelated to guilt.”³⁵

2. Preliminary considerations

(i) Waiver of solicitor-client privilege

Before discussing the test to which you should direct your evidence and brief, special discussion of waiver is required. Waiver of solicitor-client privilege is often assumed when these motions proceed. This is not the case, and a number of consequences flow from how this issue is handled.

First, waiver allows you to speak with former counsel. This is part of your ethical duty to the Court and to other counsel to not advance any allegations which may negatively affect counsel’s reputation without independent inquiry, apart from the allegations of your client³⁶.

Second, the waiver allows you to tender the affidavit of former counsel as part of your motion. A refusal to waive solicitor-client privilege does not insulate your client from former counsel’s evidence being heard. Crown counsel can seek to have the Court deem waiver so as to equip the Court with a full picture of how the guilty plea came about. Former counsel also have the right to defend his/her reputation³⁷.

Equally, a refusal to waive solicitor-client privilege, and/or failure to obtain an affidavit from former counsel, give(s) rise to a permissive (and likely inevitable) adverse inference against the accused -- former counsel’s evidence would contradict, or at least not support the accused, even if former counsel is called by the Crown³⁸.

Either way, former counsel have a right to be informed of the pending motion, and must be given sufficient time to prepare an affidavit and contact LIANS. Then a decision may be made on whether to seek to intervene.

There is, therefore, no upside to refusal to waive privilege, and counsel taking on the motion should be very clear with their client about this. Some comfort can be taken from the fact that the Court and counsel have a duty to only pierce privilege to the extent as is necessary to have the issues before the Court fully developed. There is no right to a free roam through former counsel’s file, or to stray into irrelevant areas.

(ii) Look at the involvement of counsel

It will be important, based on the preceding point, to look at the involvement of counsel leading up to and including the entry of the guilty plea and sentencing. If counsel acted, and had fulfilled the requirements as set out in the standard for a “Guilty Plea”, it will be very difficult to have the plea set aside. There would have to be a critical factor, unknown to counsel at the time, that would materially affect an aspect of the test to warrant bringing the motion.

Take, for example, receipt of late disclosure. The plea may be set aside where there is a reasonable possibility that the information would have influenced the decision to plead guilty had the information been available prior to the plea³⁹.

(iii) Consult Senior Counsel

This area can be very tricky. It involves a difficult test that may also confront the competence of previous counsel. A lawyer's obligations to the client must be balanced against the lawyer's obligations to the profession and the interests of justice. Since credibility will generally be very much alive, a thorough examination of the circumstances and a healthy measure of sound judgement will be required. It is advised that less experienced counsel consult senior members of the bar for guidance.

3. Jurisdiction

This is a relatively simple aspect. The trial court where the plea was entered is where the motion should be held, unless sentence has already been ordered. If the latter is so, you must appeal to the appropriate appellate court. In the trial court, if the judge who recorded the guilty plea heard the facts in support of the guilty plea, s/he is seized and must hear the motion to withdraw⁴⁰. If the same judge hears the motion to withdraw, this does not relieve the moving party from providing a transcript of the appearance at which the plea was taken, or any other relevant appearances.

4. Procedure

(i) Before Sentencing

The accused bears the burden to satisfy the Court to exercise its discretion in favour of permitting withdrawal of a guilty plea. S/he must, therefore give proper notice to the Court and the Crown. The Civil Procedure Rules govern for Supreme Court (Rule 29). The Provincial Court Rules do not really deal with it. Ultimately, the Crown (and, where applicable, counsel who represented the accused for the plea) will need sufficient notice and time to respond.

Counsel who represented the accused when the plea was taken must consider whether they can represent the accused at the motion to withdraw. This is generally prohibited where:

- (i)** the reasons for seeking to withdraw the plea require counsel to withdraw, or are such that counsel should seek to withdraw, per the Standard on Withdrawal as Counsel; or,
- (ii)** the Crown has indicated that it will not consent to the motion.

At a motion to invalidate the guilty plea, counsel's competence and/or reputation will be at least indirectly in the cross-hairs of the inquiry. They will become a witness, whether providing evidence in support of, or contrary to, the accused⁴¹.

Notice documents should include:

- (i)** Notice of Motion;
- (ii)** Affidavit of Accused;
- (iii)** Transcript(s) of relevant proceedings;
- (iv)** Brief of law;
- (v)** Where necessary, an affidavit from a medical or other expert;
- (vi)** A waiver of solicitor-client privilege;

(vii) An affidavit of former counsel who represented the accused when the plea was taken.

The Crown will have the right to cross-examine your client and former counsel, as well as any other affiants.

(ii) After Sentencing

Where the motion to withdraw is brought for the first time on appeal, the Civil Procedure Rules and s. 683 of the Criminal Code apply regarding the need to make a motion to adduce fresh evidence. That is, all of the requirements regarding the of launching criminal appeals apply⁴², as well as the requirement to make a motion to adduce fresh evidence.

Where the appellant was represented by counsel at the time the plea was entered, you should obtain a waiver of solicitor-client privilege and follow your ethical obligations to independently satisfy yourself that there is substance to the allegations (below)⁴³.

The fresh evidence materials must include the Notice of Motion and necessary affidavits from all witnesses upon whom you rely to substantiate the allegations. A modified version of the “Palmer” test⁴⁴ must be satisfied for the fresh evidence to be admitted⁴⁵. To add, the evidence must be filed in a manner that is admissible in substance and form, as if it were being tendered at trial. Hearsay, for example, is inadmissible⁴⁶.

Practical considerations

Practical factors will include whether the plea was made with full/adequate disclosure; the number of appearances, the time between appearances, comments made by counsel and/or the accused on record, whether counsel have represented the accused before, etc.

Special emphasis should be made regarding the timing of the motion. Once sentence has already been ordered, the Court and procedure may become more stringent for following rules. The required documents will increase in volume, at a greater cost to your client. As a logical consideration, the Court of Appeal will be more skeptical of the effort to set aside the plea, particularly where a fair bit of time has passed between the plea and sentence.

Finally, the judge(s)⁴⁷ hearing the motion will not countenance any efforts to manipulate or frustrate the system by bringing the motion. To allow the motion in such circumstances would severely undermine the principle of finality and the repute of the administration of justice⁴⁸.

1. *R. v. Elliott* (1975), 28 C.C.C. (2d) 546 (Ont. C.A.), at paras. 6-7.

2. The “interests of justice” aspect is not part of the strict test to withdraw a guilty plea. But, rare instances have occurred where newly discovered exculpatory evidence, long after the plea was taken, militate in favour of withdrawing the guilty plea. See, for example, *R. v. Hanemaayer*, 2008 ONCA 580; *R. v. Barton*, 2011 NSCA 12; *R. v. Kumar*, 2011 ONCA 120.

3. *R. v. T.(R.)* (1992), 58 O.A.C. 81, at para. 14; *R. v. Nevin*, 2006 NSCA 72, at para. 20.

4. At para. 7.

5. *R. v. Miller*, 2011 NBCA 52, at paras. 6-8.

6. See, “Guilty Plea” Standard.

7. *R. v. Clermont*, 1996 NSCA 99, at para. 35.

8. See subheading (iv), and footnotes 27 and 28 for examples.
9. *T. (R.)*, at paras. 14, 16.
10. *Ibid.*, at para. 17.
11. *Ibid.*, at para. 18.
12. *R. v. S.(D.W.)*, [2008 BCCA 453](#), at paras. 16, 21-22; *R. v. W.(M.A.)*, [2008 ONCA 555](#), at para. 25.
13. *R. v. Lamoureux* (1984), [13 C.C.C. \(3d\) 101 \(Que. C.A.\)](#); *R. v. Leo*, [1993] A.J. No. 682 (Prov. Ct.); *Nevin*; *R. v. Beuk*, [2005] O.T.C.319 (S.C.), at para. 70; *R. v. Moser* (2002), [163 C.C.C. \(3d\) 286 \(Ont. S.C.\)](#), at para. 33.
14. *Beuk*; *R. v. King*, [2004] O.J. No. 717 (C.A.)
15. *T. (R.)*, at paras. 21-23.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Nevin*, at para. 20.
18. *R. v. Cheyne* (2006), 208 O.A.C. 42, at paras. 18, 28, 35.
19. *Moser*, at para. 34; *Nevin*, at para. 20.
20. *R. v. Auja*, [2015 ONCA 325](#) (Ont. C.A.); *R. v. Shiwprashad*, [2015 ONCA 577](#).
21. *R. v. Quick*, [2016 ONCA 95](#).
22. *R. v. Wong*, [2018 SCC 25](#), at para. 4.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, at para. 6.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, at paras. 23-24.
27. *R. v. Huynh* (1986), 182 C.C.C. (3d) 69 (Alta.C.A.).
28. *R. v. Valencia*, [1998] [O.J. No. 3271 \(Gen.Div.\)](#).
29. See, for example, *R. v. L.(F.)*, [2011 NSPC 8](#); *aff'd*, 2011 NSCA 91.
30. *Moser*, at para. 38.
31. *R. v. Peters*, [2014 BCSC 983](#), at para. 33; *Nevin*, at para. 20; *T.(R.)*, at para. 13.
32. *Hanemaayer* – the accused pleaded guilty to what the police concluded years later was committed by the Scarborough Rapist, Paul Bernardo; *Barton* – the young accused pleaded guilty to sexual assault in order to avoid jail, and years later the victim's recantation and DNA analysis warranted setting aside the guilty plea.
33. *Kumar* -- one of many convictions which were overturned following the Goudge Inquiry into the practices of forensic pathologist, Dr. Charles Smith.
34. *R. v. Andhelm-White*, [2008 NSCA 86](#).
35. *R. v. McIlvrde-Lister*, [2019 ONSC 1869](#), paras. 3-4.
36. *Elliott*, at paras. 6-7; see, also *R. v. Dunbar*, [2003 BCCA 667](#), at paras. 335-337.
37. *R. v. Marriott*, [2013 NSCA 12](#), at paras. 3-2, 15-16, 31-32; *R. v. Thawer*, [1996] O.J. No. 989 (Prov. Ct.), at paras. 17-20; *R. v. Raynor*, [2014 ABQB 449](#), at paras. 18, 2-28, 33-39.
38. *Ibid*
39. *R. v. Taillefer*; *R. v. Duguay*, [2003 SCC 70](#), at paras. 85-90.
40. [Criminal Code](#), s.669; *Saskatchewan (Attorney General) v. Saskatchewan (Provincial Court Judge)* (1994) [93 C.C.C. \(3d\) 483 \(Sask.C.A.\)](#); *R. v. Savoie* (1994), [145 N.B.R. \(2d\) 131 \(C.A.\)](#); *R. v. Moise*, [2011 SKQB 53](#), at paras. 7-8.
41. [Code of Professional Conduct](#), rule 5.2-1
42. See Rule 91 of the [Civil Procedure Rules](#).
43. *Elliott*, per note 1, applies here. As well, the NSCA "[Protocol for Appeal Proceedings Involving Allegations of Ineffective Trial Counsel](#)" will likely also apply.
44. *R. v. Palmer*, [1980] [1 S.C.R.759](#).

45. *Nevin*, at para. 4; *R. v. Pivonka*, [2007 ONCA 572](#).

46. *R. v. Laffin*, [2009 NSCA 19](#), at paras. 27-34.

47. A panel of at least three judges will hear the motion as part of the appeal in the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal. A single judge will hear the motion at the trial and Summary Conviction Appeal levels.

48. *Moser*, at para. 42; *Raynor*; *Marriott*.

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#5 – Cultural Competence

LIANS » Standards » Criminal Law Standards » #5 – Cultural Competence

PREAMBLE

Cultural competence is a broad term that can encompass many aspects for different equity deserving groups. While acknowledging the need to be inclusive, this standard has a specific focus on addressing systemic racism in the justice system. In particular, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian people have been disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system and this standard aims to be responsive to that historical reality.

STANDARD

A lawyer must be aware of and apply legal principles that may impact a client's case because of the client's Indigenous identity, racial or ethnic background, or immigration status. A lawyer must take reasonable steps to inquire about a client's Indigenous identity, racial or ethnic background, or immigration status for the purpose of determining if any such legal principles apply to the client's case. In doing so, counsel must ensure the client understands the basis for such inquiry. 

lawyer must also be aware of and be able to respond to any barriers in a client's access to justice related to their belonging to an equity-deserving community. Counsel shall pay particular attention to the circumstances of Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian clients recognizing the overrepresentation of these two groups in the Justice System of Nova Scotia.¹

COMMENTARY

Along with the duty to be generally competent pursuant to the existing Lawyers' Competence standard², a lawyer has an additional duty to be culturally competent.


As the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized:

"... judges may take notice of actual racism known to exist in a particular society. Judges have done so with respect to racism in Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia (Minister of Community Services) v. S.M.S. (1992), 110 N.S.R. (2d) 91 (Fam. Ct.), it was stated at p. 108:

*[Racism] is a pernicious reality. The issue of racism existing in Nova Scotia has been well documented in the Marshall Inquiry Report (sub. nom. Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall, Jr., Prosecution). A person would have to be stupid, complacent or ignorant not to acknowledge its presence, not only individually, but also systemically and institutionally."*³

Lawyers need skills to competently represent their clients' interests in a context that is increasingly diverse and complex and in which racism is acknowledged to be present.⁴

The NS Human Rights Act recognizes that certain groups of individuals are prone to discrimination based on many factors, including cultural factors.

The Act states that discrimination takes place when a person makes a distinction, whether intentional or not, that has the effect of imposing burdens, obligations, or disadvantages on individuals, or a class of individuals, that are not imposed on others. This includes withholding or limiting access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other individuals or classes of individuals.⁵ 

Further, the Act states that no person shall discriminate against an individual, or a class of individuals, for a number of reasons including, but not limited to: race; colour; ethnic, or national or aboriginal origin.⁶

Practitioners are encouraged to approach cultural competence from an intersectional lens.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework rooted in the premise that human experience is jointly shaped by multiple social positions (e.g. race, gender), and cannot be adequately understood by considering social positions independently.⁷

Intersectionality is a recognition of the complex ways in which social identities overlap and, in negative scenarios, can create compounding experiences of discrimination and concurrent forms of oppression.⁸

As an example of the negative aspects of these forces and of intersectional discrimination, in addition to racial discrimination and discrimination on grounds of language, religion and belief, members of minorities may also face discrimination related to their caste, descent or inherited status, health, disability, migratory status, socioeconomic status, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

The racialized groups enumerated by the NS Human Rights Act may be at risk of facing individual and systemic discrimination when they participate in the justice system. Lawyers must be mindful of this and work to protect racialized clients from individual and systemic discrimination that may be present in the justice system.

Myriad reports, inquiries, and consultations describe the impacts of systemic racism in the criminal justice system that has resulted in Black and Indigenous Nova Scotians being overrepresented and underserved. This standard is meant to assist counsel in acknowledging and addressing the existence of systemic racism and discrimination⁹ against Indigenous Peoples, African Nova Scotians and Black Canadians, and other racialized groups in the criminal justice system in Nova Scotia.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE



Cultural Competence generally refers to an ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across different cultures.

In the context of practicing law, cultural competence has been described in the following way:

“In order to practise law in a culturally competent manner, ... we must (1) value an awareness of humans, and oneself, as cultural beings who are prone to stereotyping; (2) acknowledge the harmful effects of discriminatory thinking and behaviour upon human interaction; and (3) acquire and perform the skills necessary to lessen the effect of these influences in order to serve the pursuit of justice.”¹⁰

With respect to the necessary skills required in order to practice in a culturally competent manner, it may be helpful to consider the following framework:

Cultural competence comprises five essential capacities. We must:

1. Understand our own cultural positions and how they differ from and are similar to others.
2. Understand the social and cultural reality in which we live and work and in which our clients live and work.
3. Cultivate appropriate attitudes towards cultural differences.
4. Be able to generate and interpret a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal responses.
5. Understand structural oppression and demonstrate awareness and commitment to social justice.¹¹

A competent lawyer is one that recognizes limitations in one's ability to handle a matter or some aspects of it and takes steps accordingly to ensure the client is appropriately served.¹²

It is generally recognized that cultural competence requires more than a single course or workshop.¹³

The examples and resources identified in this standard are meant to promote a continuum of knowledge to assist counsel in building cultural competence and meet their professional obligations.



Self-Identification

Before counsel can identify issues of race and culture that may be present in a file, counsel must be aware of how the client identifies.

To comply with this standard, counsel shall give clients an opportunity to voluntarily state whether they self-identify as part of a racialized group, and if yes, how they identify themselves.

Counsel should explain to the client that how they identify may impact how the law applies to their matter. Any explanation of this process should be grounded in counsel's duty to take into consideration any systemic factors that may apply to the client's specific circumstances.

Indigenous Clients

Indigenous peoples have a special constitutional relationship with the Crown. This relationship is recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act and section 25 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in the Canadian criminal justice system.

Many inquiries, commissions, task forces and research studies have shown direct links between the historical and ongoing colonial laws, policies, processes and systems, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system.

Crown Policy on Indigenous Peoples

The Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service is mandated to follow policy titled, "Fair Treatment of Indigenous Peoples in Criminal Prosecutions in Nova Scotia"¹⁴. Defence counsel must also be aware of this policy. This policy touches on all aspects of criminal court proceedings including: decisions to prosecute; restorative justice options; arraignments; bail proceedings; trials, and sentencing hearings. The policy states that individual Crown Attorneys must:

"...recognize and factor in the unique systemic or background factors that may have contributed to an Indigenous person's criminal conduct. As well, Crown Attorneys should also consider procedures and sanctions appropriate in the circumstances of the offender because of his or her particular Indigenous heritage"

or connection. The maintenance of social harmony, safety, and stability, within Indigenous communities, and as between these communities and non-Indigenous communities, should be a significant consideration of a Crown Attorney, in cases involving an Indigenous offender.

...

This policy is also intended to align, in part, with those standards adopted by the Federal Department of Justice in the Aboriginal Justice Strategy, but is particularized to the individual and unique circumstances of the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, as well as those of other Indigenous heritage interacting with the justice system of Nova Scotia."

Crown Attorneys must work to ensure that the objectives of the NS Public Prosecution Service policy are met. These objectives include but are not limited to:

- To contribute to a decrease in the rates of victimization, crime and incarceration among Indigenous peoples in Nova Scotia by conducting culturally competent prosecutions involving Indigenous peoples.
- To sensitize and train Crown Attorneys to include Indigenous values such as those referenced in the Gladue decision throughout their range of contact with the criminal justice system in Nova Scotia.

Crown Attorneys and Defence Counsel should be aware that the NS Public Prosecution Service policy on ensuring the fair treatment of Indigenous peoples is an acknowledgement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Call for Action.¹⁵

If an individual Crown is failing to meet their obligations under this policy, and defence counsel fails to flag this, then defence counsel has also failed. The consequence could be a miscarriage of justice.

African Nova Scotian and Black Clients

Anti-Black racism in the criminal justice system is a concern for people of African descent [in] Nova Scotia—a province shaped by slavery and segregation.¹⁶

As described by Angela Simmonds in the NSBS Equity Lens Toolkit:

"Our province's formal and informal social structures were designed to exclude Black Nova Scotians from the moment they arrived here over 400 years ago. The

history of anti-black racism impacts all aspects of civic life for Black Nova Scotians. However, there are also specific ways this history of anti-black racism lives in the justice system, and lawyers are obligated to have a general awareness of this history to be effective advocates for their clients."

The overrepresentation of African Nova Scotians and Black Canadians in the criminal justice system is well documented and has manifested itself in numerous ways¹⁷ including but not limited to: racial profiling, the illegal collection of personal data by police through the use of 'street checks'¹⁸, excessive use of force by police, higher rates of incarceration, disproportionate negative treatment while in custody, lack of disaggregated race-based data collection, other multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE: SPECIFIC LEGAL ISSUES

For the purpose of this standard, it is imperative that counsel be aware of substantive legal issues relevant to specific cultural groups in the practice of criminal law.

Although not an exhaustive list, the following are examples of issues of race and culture that may arise when advocating on behalf of a racialized client:

Race Based Challenge for Cause in Jury Selection

A jury is required to be a representative cross-section of society, honestly and fairly chosen.¹⁹

The exclusion of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups from juries is a longstanding, historical problem.²⁰

Under s. 638(1)(b) of the Criminal Code a party may challenge a juror "for cause" alleging that the juror may not be indifferent. The test is whether there is a realistic potential that the jury pool may contain people who are not impartial in the sense that even upon proper instructions by the trial judge they may not be able to set aside their prejudice and decide fairly between the Crown and the accused.²¹

One of the ways that a prospective juror may be indifferent is by harbouring racial bias against the accused. Courts have recognized that parties are entitled to challenge prospective jurors on racial prejudices that might affect their impartiality.²²



Failure to advise a racialized client of their right to challenge prospective jurors for race-based bias, commonly referred to as a Parks challenge, can be grounds for a finding of ineffective assistance of counsel.

In its 2011 decision in *R v Fraser*²³, the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal (NSCA) considered defence counsel's failure to instruct his African Nova Scotian client on the possibility of a race-based challenge for cause. The client expressed concerns to his trial counsel about facing an all-White jury.

Justice Saunders held that trial counsel's "failure to provide advice to the appellant in response to his client's explicit and perfectly reasonable inquiries, effectively denied him his statutory right to challenge potential jurors for cause." Justice Saunders emphasized that this failing "in and of itself would justify a new trial." These comments from the NSCA in *R v Fraser* confirm that an understanding of and ability to advise one's client on race-based challenges for cause is a basic competency required by defence counsel.²⁴

Canvassing Gladue Factors at Sentencing

In 1996, section 718.2(e)²⁵ of the Criminal Code was enacted. Its purpose was to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian prisons by requiring sentencing judges to consider sanctions other than imprisonment for all offenders, and specifically pay attention to the unique circumstances of Aboriginal offenders.

Section 718.2(e) directs sentencing judges to undertake the sentencing of aboriginal offenders individually, but also differently, because the circumstances of aboriginal peoples are unique. In sentencing an aboriginal offender, the judge must consider:

- (1) The unique systemic or background factors which may have played a part in bringing the particular aboriginal offender before the courts; and
- (2) The types of sentencing procedures and sanctions which may be appropriate in the circumstances for the offender because of his or her particular aboriginal heritage or connection.²⁶

This section was authoritatively interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Gladue*²⁷ where the Court held that:



In our view, s. 718.2(e) is more than simply a re-affirmation of existing sentencing principles. The remedial component of the provision consists not only in the fact that it codifies a principle of sentencing, but, far more importantly, in its direction to sentencing judges to undertake the process of sentencing aboriginal offenders differently, in order to endeavour to achieve a truly fit and proper sentence in the particular case.

The Supreme Court's decision in Gladue had important ramifications for justice system participants and stakeholders. To achieve the purpose and maintain the principles set out in Gladue, a number of programs were established, funded by the federal and provincial governments.²⁸

Various critiques and concerns about the application of Gladue were subsequently raised. In 2012, the Supreme Court in R v Ipeelee²⁹ reaffirmed its commitment to the principles enunciated in Gladue, addressed a number of critiques, and clarified concerns.

Counsel must be familiar with section 718.2(e) of the Code, the principles affirmed in Gladue and Ipeelee, and their applicability for all Indigenous accused.

In Nova Scotia, the requirement from Gladue for courts to canvass the unique systemic or background factors that have played a part in an Indigenous accused coming before the court is facilitated through the preparation of Gladue reports.

The Mi'kmaw Legal Support Network provides training to the professionals who prepare Gladue reports in Nova Scotia.

Gladue factors that may be considered in a Gladue report include but are not limited to:

1. Substance abuse personally and in the immediate family
2. Physical abuse in personal relationships
3. Violence in the family
4. Deterioration of Health
5. Negative education outcomes and lack of economic opportunities stemming from systemic barriers



6. Poverty
7. Mobility
8. Home and food security
9. Overt and covert Racism
10. Loss of identity, culture, and ancestral knowledge

In Nova Scotia, the legacy of residential schools³⁰ along with Indian day schools³¹, and their devastating impact on Indigenous communities is also commonly referred to within a Gladue report.

Defence Counsel must be satisfied that Indigenous clients understand the importance and availability of Gladue reports prior to proceeding to sentencing.

It is recommended that counsel obtain an express waiver if their clients do not want a Gladue report.

A form detailing the required information to order a Gladue report can be found on the Nova Scotia Courts website:

https://www.courts.ns.ca/sites/default/files/forms/NSPC%20Criminal%20Forms/ML_SN_Gladue_Report_Sentencing_Circle_Request_April_2022.pdf

Canvassing Cultural Factors for People of African Descent at Sentencing

An emerging approach in Nova Scotia in sentencing African Nova Scotians and Black Canadians is the use of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments (IRCAs) within the sentencing process.

As explained by Professor Maria Dugas, these reports:

...provide the court with necessary information about the effect of systemic anti-Black racism on people of African descent. They connect this information to the individual's lived experience, articulating how the experience of racism has informed the circumstance of the offender, the offence, and how it might inform the offender's experience of the carceral state.

IRCAs are necessary in the light of the historical and ongoing systemic anti-Black racism present in Canada, and its effect on Black Canadians' lived experiences. The prevalence of anti-Black racism is directly connected to the history of slavery and subjugation of people of African descent in Canada. One way in which anti-Black racism continues to manifest in

this country is through the overincarceration of Black Canadians. The incarceration rate of Black Canadians is three times our representation rate in society. This is not simply because Black people commit more crimes.

It is because of pervasive, systemic anti-Black racism that permeates our institutions and social structures. The association of black skin with criminality has deep roots. It can be traced back to “runaway slave ads,” which portrayed self-liberated people of African descent as thieves and criminals. Slaveholders would place ads in the newspaper when enslaved people escaped and would use the court system to affirm their property interests in the enslaved person.

The United Nations’ Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent recognized the overincarceration of African Canadian people following their visit to Canada in 2016. The Working Group noted that they were “deeply concerned about the human rights situation of African Canadians” and “particularly concerned about the overrepresentation of African Canadians in the criminal justice system.” Despite representing only 3.5% of the population Black Canadians represented 8.6% of the total incarcerated population in 2016–2017, and 8% of the total incarcerated population in 2018–2019. In 2017–2018, Black offenders represented 12% of the incarcerated “young adult” population (ages 18-21).³²

Judges can and should take judicial notice of the legacy of slavery and the existence of systemic anti-Black racism however IRCAs are still very important in order to draw the connection between these systemic background factors and why the accused is before the court. This information can not only serve to provide greater context to the sentencing judge but in some cases can be a lens through which to view the moral culpability of an African Canadian accused and in that sense IRCAs can also serve a mitigating purpose.³³

In *R. v. Anderson*³⁴, the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal affirmed the value of IRCAs as a valuable resource when sentencing African Nova Scotians and endorsed a comprehensive approach to address systemic overrepresentation in custody of African Nova Scotians.

The Court directed that it may amount to an error of law if a sentencing judge fails to consider systemic factors when sentencing an African Nova Scotian offender:



[118] The “method” employed for sentencing African Nova Scotian offenders should carefully consider the systemic and background factors detailed in an IRCA. It may amount to an error of law for a sentencing judge to ignore or fail to inquire into these factors. A judge does not have to be satisfied a causal link has been established “between the systemic and background factors and commission of the offence...” These principles parallel the requirements in law established by the Supreme Court of Canada in relation to Gladue factors in the sentencing of Indigenous offenders. As with Indigenous offenders, **while an African Nova Scotian offender can decide not to request an IRCA, a sentencing judge cannot preclude comparable information being offered, or fail to consider an offender’s background and circumstances in relation to the systemic factors of racism and marginalization. To do so may amount to an error of law.**

[Emphasis Added]

Importantly, the Court endorsed a holistic application of IRCAs and said that it may amount to an error of law if sentencing judges are unable to articulate how systemic factors have been applied to the sentencing analysis:

[120] IRCAs can support the use of rehabilitation in sentencing, “One of the main objectives of Canadian criminal law...” and “one of the fundamental moral values that distinguish Canadian society from the societies of many other nations in the world...”. IRCAs can provide a foundation on which to build alternatives to incarceration for Black offenders and reduce the over-reliance on imprisonment.

[121] As the ANSDPAD Coalition asked this Court to recognize, the social context information supplied by an IRCA can assist in:

- Contextualizing the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender.
- Revealing the existence of mitigating factors or explaining their absence.
- Addressing aggravating factors and offering a deeper explanation for them.
- Informing the principles of sentencing and the weight to be accorded to denunciation and deterrence.
- Identifying rehabilitative and restorative options for the offender and appropriate opportunities for reparations by the offender to the victim and the community.

- Strengthening the offender's engagement with their community.
- Informing the application of the parity principle. "Courts must ensure that a formalistic approach to parity in sentencing does not undermine the remedial purpose of s. 718.2(e)".⁶³
- Reducing reliance on incarceration.

[122] **The Crown's roadmap analysis aligns with the ANSDPAD Coalition's holistic application for IRCAs. It is an approach this Court endorses.** IRCAs can enrich and guide the application of sentencing principles to Black offenders. The systemic factors described by the IRCA in Mr. Anderson's case and his experiences as an African Nova Scotian navigating racism and marginalization are not unique. IRCAs should be available to assist judges in any sentencing involving an offender of African descent. IRCAs can ensure judges, when engaged in "one of the most delicate stages of the criminal justice process in Canada", are equipped to view the offender through a sharply focused lens.

[123] In explaining their sentences, judges should make more than passing reference to the background of an African Nova Scotian offender. It may not be enough to simply describe the offender's history in great detail. It should be possible on appeal for the court to determine, based on the record or the judge's reasons, that proper attention was given to the circumstances of the offender. **Where this cannot be discerned, appellate intervention may be warranted.**

[124] The role of IRCAs in the sentencing of African Nova Scotian offenders will serve to enhance the credibility of the criminal justice system in the eyes of a broad and diverse public by increasing the likelihood of the sentences imposed being seen as just and appropriate. Respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society is not achieved by putting disproportionate numbers of Black and Indigenous offenders behind bars having left unaddressed, in the context of sentencing, the deeply entrenched historical disadvantage and systemic racism that more than likely had a hand in bringing them before the courts.

[Emphasis Added]



As directed in Anderson, social context information detailing how systemic racism has impacted an African Nova Scotian offender must be brought forward at sentencing.

The Nova Scotia Court of Appeal subsequently affirmed the analysis from Anderson in R. v. Wournell, 2023 NSCA 53 and R. v. R.B.W., 2023 NSCA 58.

Defence counsel must be satisfied that African Nova Scotian clients understand the importance and availability of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments [IRCAs] prior to proceeding to sentencing.

It is recommended that counsel obtain an express waiver if their clients do not want an IRCA.

It has become the practice of Court Services in Nova Scotia to fund IRCAs upon an order being made by the Court.

Once an IRCA is ordered by the court, The African Nova Scotian Justice Institute Forensic Assessment and Treatment Unit takes responsibility for processing, assigning, and supervising IRCAs.

A form detailing the required information to order an IRCA can be found on the Nova Scotia Courts website:

https://www.courts.ns.ca/sites/default/files/forms/NSPC%20Criminal%20Forms/Impact_of_Race_and_Culture_Assessment_Request_Form_March_2023.pdf

Once an IRCA is ordered by the court, The African Nova Scotian Justice Institute Forensic Assessment and Treatment Unit takes responsibility for processing, assigning, and supervising Impact of Race and Culture Assessments.³⁵

Cultural Factors at Bail

Sentencing is not the only stage of proceedings where factors of race and culture should be considered by counsel.

When considering interim release, counsel should be aware that on December 18, 2019, s. 493.2 of the Criminal Code came into force and states:



Aboriginal accused or vulnerable populations

493.2 In making a decision under this Part, a peace officer, justice or judge shall give particular attention to the circumstances of

(a) Aboriginal accused; and

(b) accused who belong to a vulnerable population that is overrepresented in the criminal justice system and that is disadvantaged in obtaining release under this Part.

This new section essentially codifies the principles of Gladue and Ipeelee at the bail stage and adds consideration for those from “vulnerable populations” with the intent of reducing incarceration of people traditionally marginalized by the criminal justice system.

The application of Gladue factors and cultural factors for African Nova Scotians at the bail stage has previously been adopted by some courts in Nova Scotia.³⁶

If a client waives their right to a Gladue report or similarly does not wish to have an IRCA ordered at the bail stage, counsel should consider whether it is appropriate to lead cultural evidence for Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, or Black clients at the bail hearing in order provide context for the Court, notwithstanding the ability of judges to take judicial notice of systemic racism and its applicability to interim release.

Racial Profiling

It is not uncommon for counsel to hear from an African Nova Scotian or Black client that they were pulled over by police for ‘driving while black’. Rather than dismissing this notion, counsel should be aware of the existence of racial profiling and turn their mind to its applicability when dealing with racialized clients.

“The concept of racial profiling is primarily concerned with the motivation of the police. It occurs when race or racial stereotypes about offending or dangerousness are used. Consciously or unconsciously, **to any degree** in suspect selection or subject treatment”.³⁷

In Nova Scotia, racial profiling was brought to the forefront in the Kirk Johnson human rights case.³⁸



A Nova Scotia Board of Inquiry found that the Halifax Regional Police discriminated against Kirk Johnson on the basis of race when a police officer stopped Mr. Johnson while he was driving, fined him, and towed away his car.

In the 2019 Ontario Court of Appeal decision *R. v. Dudgeon*³⁹, Justice Paciocco confirmed the appropriate analysis to be applied when considering whether racial profiling has occurred:

[62] In my view, it is self-evident that a decision need not be motivated solely or even mainly on race or racial stereotypes to nevertheless be “based on” race or racial stereotypes. If illegitimate thinking about race or racial stereotypes factors into suspect selection or subject treatment, any pretence that the decision was reasonable is defeated. The decision will be contaminated by improper thinking and cannot satisfy the legal standards in place for suspect selection or subject treatment.

[63] Put simply, passages such as para. 11 of *R. v. Brown*, and para. 33 in *Bombardier*, are entirely consistent with the proposition accepted in *Le and Peart*. Where race or racial stereotypes are used to any degree in suspect selection or subject treatment, there will be no reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds. The decision will amount to racial profiling.

...

[66] In sum, there are two components to racial profiling. The first is the attitudinal component, which is the acceptance by a person in authority that race or racial stereotypes are relevant in identifying the propensity to offend or to be dangerous. The second is the causation component, which requires that this race-based thinking consciously or unconsciously motivate or influence, to any degree, decisions by persons in authority in suspect selection or subject treatment.

The issue of racial profiling was recently explored in the Nova Scotia Provincial Court decision of *R. v. Sparks*, 2022 NSPC 51.

Race & Arbitrary Detention

If racial profiling can be established, any resulting detention could be deemed to have taken place arbitrarily, in violation of s. 9 of the Charter and counsel should be prepared to argue this appropriately.⁴⁰



In *R. v. Le*⁴¹, Justices Brown and Martin, writing for the majority, relied on social science evidence to underscore the importance of racial context when considering s. 9 of the Charter:

[74] It is important, at the outset, to understand both the place and purpose of race as a consideration in the detention analysis and how it differs from the concept of racial profiling.

[75] At the detention stage of the analysis, the question is how a reasonable person of a similar racial background would perceive the interaction with the police. The focus is on how the combination of a racialized context and minority status would affect the perception of a reasonable person in the shoes of the accused as to whether they were free to leave or compelled to remain. The s. 9 detention analysis is thus contextual in nature and involves a wide ranging inquiry. It takes into consideration the larger, historic and social context of race relations between the police and the various racial groups and individuals in our society. The reasonable person in Mr. Le's shoes is presumed to be aware of this broader racial context.

In finding serious Charter-infringing police misconduct, the Court accepted that racialized people may experience interactions with the police differently given the historic over-policing of racialized communities. The majority also challenged the assumption that more frequent interactions with the police would make it less likely that a person felt detained. In fact, the opposite may be true. Racialized people are subjected to more frequent and unpleasant interactions with the police, leading to heightened suspicion and a reasonable apprehension that one is being detained.⁴²

Cross Racial Identification

"The inherent frailties of identification evidence have been recognized in a myriad of ways for a long time in the existing jurisprudence."⁴³

Intersecting with the existing frailties of identification evidence is the additional layer of cross-racial identification.

"Cross-racial identification evidence has been identified by the courts as fraught with particular difficulty for some time."⁴⁴



The phenomenon of cross-racial identification or the ‘other-race’ effect has been described in the following fashion⁴⁵:

In essence, this means that members of one race have increased difficulties in identifying distinguishing characteristics present in members of different races. It can be said that, “when persons are identified as belonging to groups other than our own, we attribute more similarity among them than we attribute to persons perceived as belonging to our own group.” Thus, this impairment is not always a choice, meaning that the person identifying the accused is often not necessarily subjectively “racist.” Instead, more often than not, this is a matter of psychological exposure and personal history.

There are numerous factors that should be considered in an analysis of cross-racial identification evidence⁴⁶ but generally if cross-racial identification arises, the trier of fact must be alive to the possibility that this might cause the witness some difficulty or constitute a reason to regard their evidence with greater caution.

Counsel should be aware of the potential frailties in cross-racial identification evidence and be prepared to argue this as the issue arises.

Immigration

Counsel must take reasonable step to determine a client’s immigration status upon being retained by the client.

Immigration consequences have been deemed to be a legally relevant consequence flowing from a guilty plea⁴⁷ and as such, may have a bearing on the ultimate outcome for the client.⁴⁸

Additional Resources

For further information and to find resources for skill development in cultural competency, counsel are encouraged to explore the Nova Scotia Barristers’ Society Equity and Access Resources page at: <https://nsbs.org/legal-profession/your-practice/practice-supportresources/equity-access-resources/>

Counsel are also encouraged to become familiar with the central tenets of Critical Race Theory. A helpful primer can be found here:

[Critical Race Theory Primer by Joshua Sealy-Harrington](#)



Definitions

As the nomenclature surrounding distinct groups evolves it is important to understand some of the terms used for the purpose of this Standard:

Mi'kmaw: (Mi'kmaw, Micmac or L'nu, “the people” in Mi'kmaq) are the founding people of Nova Scotia. The Mi'kmaw nation has existed in Mi'kma'ki in what is now known as Nova Scotia for thousands of years.⁴⁹

Indigenous: Indigenous is understood to mean the communities, peoples, and nations that have a historical continuity with pre-invasion, pre-settler, or pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, as distinct from the other societies now settled on those territories (or parts of them).⁵⁰

African Nova Scotians: African Nova Scotians / Indigenous Blacks are a distinct people who descend from free and enslaved Black Planters, Black Loyalists, Black Refugees, Maroons, and other Black people who inhabited the original 52 land-based Black communities in that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia.⁵¹

Persons of African Descent: Persons of African descent and/or those who identify as part of the African diaspora, the collection of African descent communities. In Canada Black-Canadian or African-Canadian is often used.

Black: A term which recognizes the unified descent of African peoples while acknowledging a common experience of oppression. This term is interchangeable with People of African Descent.

Racialized: This term refers to groups that have come to be designated as being a particular “race” and on that basis, are subjected to differential and/or unequal treatment.

Other Equity Deserving Groups

Women: Persons self-identifying as women.

2SLGBTQIA+: An acronym for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual while + stands for other ways individuals express their gender and sexuality outside heteronormativity and the gender binary. The placement of Two-Spirit (2S) first is to recognize that

Indigenous people are the first peoples of this land and their understanding of gender and sexuality precedes colonization.

Persons with Disabilities: Persons with disabilities are people who have a chronic, long-term or recurring physical, sensory, mental, learning or intellectual impairment, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders that person's full and effective participation in society. This includes, but isn't limited to, people whose functional limitations due to their impairment have been accommodated in their workplace (ex: by the use of technical aids, changes to equipment or other working arrangements).

Examples of groups of persons with a disability:

- Coordination/dexterity
- Blind/visual impairment
- Speech Impairment
- Non-visible physical impairment
- Developmental/mental impairment
- Mobility impairment
- Learning disability
- Deaf/hearing impairment
- Psychiatric impairment

NOTES

1 The requirement to pay particular attention to clients with Mi'kmaw or African Nova Scotian ancestry is in accordance with the recommendations from the Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall, Jr., Prosecution, see [Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution \(1989\)](#):

- Recommendation # 13: We recommend that the Dalhousie Law School, the Nova Scotia Barristers Society and the Judicial Councils support courses and programs dealing with legal issues facing visible minorities, and encourage sensitivity to minority concerns for law students, lawyers and judges.

- Recommendation # 27: We recommend that a program of ongoing liaison between the bar – prosecutors, private defence and legal aid – and Native people, both on and off reserve, be established through the Nova Scotia Barristers Society. The Society must also educate its members concerning the special needs of Native clients;

2 See Lawyers' Competence Standard, online:

<https://www.lians.ca/standards/criminal-law-standards/2-lawyers-competence>

3 [*R. v. R.D.S.* \[1997\] 3 SCR 484](#) at para. 47.

4 Robert Wright, "Cultural Competence 101 for Lawyers: Meeting Professional and Ethical Standards", Presented for the Board and Staff of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, January 22, 2016, at slide 5. Online: See the NSBS equity portal: <https://site-vnutyj3m.dotezcdn.com/uploads/C69D93338D096684.pdf>

5 [*Human Rights Act, RSNS 1989, c 214*](#), s.4.

6 [*Human Rights Act, RSNS 1989, c 214*](#), s.5.

7 Bauer GR, Churchill SM, Mahendran M, Walwyn C, Lizotte D, Villa-Rueda AA. "[Intersectionality in quantitative research: A systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods.](#)" SSM Popul Health. 2021 Apr 16;14:100798. doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100798. PMID: 33997247; PMCID:PMC8095182.

8 UN Secretary-General (UNSG), [Guidance Note on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities](#), March 2013.

9 "Systemic discrimination involves the concept that the application of uniform standards, common rules, and treatment of people who are not the same constitutes a form of discrimination. It means that in treating unlike people alike, adverse consequences, hardship, or injustice may result." Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact on the Indian and Metis People of Alberta (Canada), "[Justice on trial: report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and its Impact on the Indian and Metis People of Alberta](#)", March, 1991

10 Rose Voyvodic, "Lawyers Meet the Social Context: Understanding Cultural Competence" (2006) 84:3 The Canadian Bar Review 564 at 564



11 Wright, supra, note 2, at slide 10

12 Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, Code of Professional Conduct, (Approved by Council September 23, 2011, Effective January 1, 2012 as amended January 20, 2012; July 20, 2012; February 22, 2013; September 19, 2014; January 23, 2015; May 22, 2015; February 26, 2016; April 22, 2016; May 27, 2016; May 26, 2017; July 20, 2018; January 24, 2020), online: <https://nsbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CodeofProfessionalConduct.pdf>

13 Federation of Law Societies, Model Code of Professional Conduct, (October 19, 2019), online: <https://flsc-s3-storage-pub.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/Model-Code-October-2019.pdf>

14 Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service, Fair Treatment of Indigenous Peoples in Criminal Prosecutions in Nova Scotia, DPP Directive (October 2, 2018) online: https://novascotia.ca/pps/publications/ca_manual/AdministrativePolicies/Fair-Treatment-of-Indigenous-Peoples.pdf

15 In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC] released 94 “calls to action” regarding reconciliation between Canadian and Indigenous peoples. The following TRC Calls to Action are of particular relevance to lawyers practicing in criminal law:

27. We call upon the Federation of Law Societies of Canada to ensure that lawyers receive appropriate cultural competency training, which includes the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal– Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

30. We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so.

38. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next decade.



16 Michelle Y. Williams, “African Nova Scotian Restorative Justice: A Change Has Gotta Come” (2013), Dalhousie Law Journal, Volume 36, No. 2

17 United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Canada”, August, 2017, 36th Session, Agenda item 9, online: https://fbec-cefn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UN-Working-Group-Report_EN.pdf

18 J. Michael MacDonald, “Independent Legal Opinion on Street Checks”, 2019, online: https://humanrights.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/editoruploads/independent_legal_opinion_on_street_checks.pdf

...a street check involves two parts: an action (the police interact with, or observe, an individual) and record-keeping (the police collect and retain identifying information about the individual, in a database); Dr. Scot Wortley, “Halifax, Nova Scotia: Street Checks Report” March, 2019, online:

https://humanrights.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/editoruploads/halifax_street_checks_report_march_2019_0.pdf; Minister’s Directive on Street Checks: <https://novascotia.ca/just/publications/docs/Minister-Directive-Street-Checks-Ban.pdf>

19 [*R. v. Kokopenace*, 2015 SCC 28, \[2015\] 2 S.C.R. 398](#)

20 Julianne Stevenson, CHALLENGING WHITENESS: The Role for Law Societies and Critical Race Theory in Addressing Unrepresentative Juries in Canada, 2018.

21 [*R. v. Find*, 2001 SCC 32](#) at para. 31

22 [*R v Parks* \(1993\), 15 OR \(3d\) 324](#) (CA), leave to appeal to SCC refused, [1993] SCCA No 481.

23 [*R. v. Fraser*, 2011 NSCA 70](#)

24 Stevenson, *supra*, note 10, at page 10

25 [*Criminal Code*, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46](#), 718.2: A court that imposes a sentence shall also take into consideration the following principles:

...

(e) all available sanctions, other than imprisonment, that are reasonable in the 

circumstances and consistent with the harm done to victims or to the community should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders.

26 The Practitioner’s Criminal Code, 2020 Ed. (Gold)

27 *R. v. Gladue*, [1999] 1 S.C.R. 688 at para. 32

28 Research and Statistics Division Department of Justice, Canada, “Spotlight on Gladue: Challenges, Experiences, and Possibilities in Canada’s Criminal Justice System”, 2017 see <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/gladue/gladue.pdf>

29 *R. v. Ipeelee*, [2012] 1 SCR 433

30 See for example: <https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2020/09/the-former-shubenacadie-indian-residential-school—shubenacadie-novascotia.html>

31 See for example: <http://www.membertou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Op-Ed-Indian-Day-Schools.pdf>

32 Maria Dugas, “Committing to Justice: The Case for Impact of Race and Culture Assessments in Sentencing African Canadian Offenders” (2020), Dalhousie Law Journal, Volume 43, No. 1

33 *R. v. Jackson*, [2018] O.J. No. 2136 at para. 38 & *R. v. Morris*, [2018] O.J. No. 4631 at para. 75

34 *R. v. Anderson*, 2021 NSCA 62

35 See: <https://www.ansji.ca/forensic-assessment-pillar>

36 For example, In the unreported decision of *R. v. Perry* (March 5, 2017) Nova Scotia CRH 450525 (Supreme Court of Nova Scotia) at p. 24, Justice Muise stated that he could take judicial notice of “the over-representation about aboriginal persons and African Nova Scotians in custody both on remand and serving sentences.”

37 *R v Le*, 2019 SCC 34 at para. 76

38 *Johnson v Halifax (Regional Municipality) Police Service*, [2003] NSHRBID No 2

39 *R v Dudhi*, [2019] OJ No 4333



40 See Charter standard

41 *R. v. Le*, supra note 29 starting at paragraph 74

42 Steph Brown, “Setting the Scene: *R. v. Le* and the Importance of Context in s. 9 Analysis”, theCourt.ca (Oct. 29, 2019), online: <http://www.thecourt.ca/settingthe-scene-r-v-le-and-the-importance-of-context-in-s-9-analysis/>

43 *R. v MacLellan*, 2017 NSSC 307 at para. 26

44 Ibid at para. 37

45 Alison Aho, “Identification and Recognition Evidence: Determining Admissibility With Respect to Race” (2016)

46 MacLellan, supra note 36 starting at para. 37

47 *R. v. Wong*, [2018] 1 SCR 696

48 See [#4 – Withdrawal of Guilty Pleas](#) standard.

49 Office of L’Nu Affairs, online: <https://novascotia.ca/abor/aboriginal-people/demographics/>

50 Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary of Terms, online: <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/resources/glossary-a-terms-en-gb-1>

51 African Nova Scotian Strategy, Dalhousie University, online: <https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/african-nova-scotian-connection/african-nova-scotian-strategy.html>

Approved by Council on January 26, 2024.

Standards

▣ #1 – Withdrawal as Counsel

▣ #2 – Lawyers’ Competence



- ▶ #3 – Defence Obligations
Regarding Disclosure
- ▶ #4 – Withdrawal of Guilty Plea
- ▶ #5 – Cultural Competence
- ▶ #6 – Charter Applications

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#6 – Charter Applications

[LIANS](#) » [Standards](#) » [Criminal Law Standards](#) » #6 – Charter Applications

STANDARD

1. A lawyer who is retained must review the disclosure as soon as possible to determine whether there are grounds for making an application for a Charter remedy, pursuant to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (“*Charter*”)¹.
2. If grounds exist for making a Charter application, the lawyer must make reasonable efforts to obtain instructions (preferably in writing) from the client regarding whether to make an Application. The obligation to assess a case for a *Charter* Application is a continuing one.
3. A lawyer must provide reasonable notice of a *Charter* Application to the Crown and to the Court.²

COMMENTARY

Jurisdiction

The primary remedy for a *Charter* violation is for the accused to make an Application to the trial court, pursuant to s. 24. Under s. 24, “Anyone whose [*Charter*] rights and freedoms...have been infringed or denied” may apply for a remedy to a court of “competent jurisdiction.”³ A trial court, as a “court of competent jurisdiction,” may give an “appropriate and just” remedy (s. 24(1)), or exclude evidence obtained in violation of the *Charter* if admission would bring the administration of justice into disrepute (s. 24(2)).⁴

All criminal trial courts, including trials before Provincial Court judges, are “courts of competent jurisdiction,” as defined by s. 2 of the *Criminal Code* for the purposes of granting s. 24 *Charter* remedies⁵. Section 24 does not confer on the courts new jurisdiction; those courts already had “jurisdiction conferred by a statute over the offences and persons, and power to make the orders sought.”⁶

On the other hand, the Supreme Court in *Mills* unanimously ruled that a justice at a preliminary inquiry was not a court of competent jurisdiction for the purpose of granting *Charter* remedies under s. 24. Their jurisdiction under what is now Part XVIII of the *Criminal Code* was limited to considering whether there is sufficient evidence to put the accused on trial. Notwithstanding that the rules for the admissibility of evidence apply at preliminary inquiries, there is no jurisdiction for a justice at a preliminary inquiry to consider whether evidence should be excluded under s. 24(2) as having been obtained in violation of the *Charter*.⁷

Courts have held that judges at extradition hearings are “courts of competent jurisdiction” for the purposes of s. 24⁸; however, parole boards are not⁹.

Justices at bail hearings do not have *Charter* jurisdiction¹⁰.

A divided Supreme Court in *R. v. Hape*¹¹ held that the *Charter* does not apply to Canadian police acting outside Canada unless the foreign jurisdiction consents to their enforcement jurisdiction. However, in *Khadr v. Canada (Minister of Justice)*, the Court created an exception where action violate Canada’s international obligations.¹²

Lawyers should be careful to consider the availability of potential *Charter* applications that are specific to racialized clients, including:

- a. Racial Profiling, (see *R. Dudhi, 2019 ONCA 665*);

b. Police authority to question¹³ individuals, (see [R. v. Le, 2019 SCC 34](#)).

Failure to Bring a Charter Application may Have Unintended Consequences

The purpose of this standard may seem self-evident. After all, the failure to make a *Charter* Application, where there is evidence of a *Charter* breach, may prejudice the defence. This is particularly true in cases of “impaired over .08.”

To address the challenges posed by a large number of impaired driving offences, Parliament has, over the years, taken steps to simplify and streamline the trial process. One of those steps involved the introduction of evidentiary shortcuts into the *Criminal Code*. These shortcuts are now found in ss. 320.31(1) of the *Criminal Code* (formerly 258(1)(c) and 258(1)(g) of the *Code*). They permit the Crown to establish an accused’s blood-alcohol concentration at the time of the alleged offence by filing a certificate recording the accused’s breath readings.

To ensure that those evidentiary shortcuts yield reliable evidence, Parliament built a number of preconditions into the scheme—the most notable being that the breath samples have to be taken within a prescribed period of time following the alleged offence.¹⁴

If there are issues related to the proof of the evidentiary preconditions, the demand for breath (or blood) samples may be unlawful. For example, a demand made to provide a breath sample into the approved screening device without the required reasonable suspicion under section 254(2) is a warrantless and unreasonable search, pursuant to s. 8 of the *Charter*. However, if the lawyer chooses not to bring a *Charter* Application at trial, the Crown does not have to prove that the demand was a “lawful demand” before it can take advantage of the evidentiary shortcuts: [Rilling v. The Queen](#)¹⁵. Rilling has been applied in Nova Scotia, and remains good law¹⁶.

Justice Moldaver places the practical importance of the *Charter* Application in context at paragraph 11 of [R. v. Alex](#):

When ss. 258(1)(c) and 258(1)(g) are analyzed in accordance with the modern principles of statutory interpretation, I am satisfied that the Crown need not prove that the demand was lawful in order to take advantage of the shortcuts. If the taking of the samples is subjected to Charter scrutiny, and the evidence of the breath test results is found to be inadmissible by virtue of ss. 8 and 24(2) of the

*Charter, that will end the matter. Resort to the evidentiary shortcuts will be a non-issue. On the other hand, if the taking of the samples is subjected to s. 8 Charter scrutiny, and the breath test results are found to be admissible in evidence—either because no s. 8 breach occurred or because the evidence survived s. 24(2) Charter scrutiny—the shortcuts should remain available to the Crown. [emphasis added].*¹⁷

Reasonable Notice

Where a *Charter* challenge involves an attack on the constitutional validity of a law, the applicant must comply with statutory notices to be given to the Attorneys General of Canada, or the Province, or both.¹⁸ In Nova Scotia, the notice period is 14 days.¹⁹

If the lawyer files his or her *Charter* Application in Provincial Court, or if the Application is to exclude evidence pursuant to section 24(2) of the Charter, the applicant must file a Notice of Application with the Court, and serve it on the respondent, at least 7 days prior to the date of the first appearance for the application²⁰. Pre-trial applications are to be heard 60 days prior to the beginning of the trial, unless the Court orders otherwise.²¹

The purpose of notice of a *Charter* Application has been summarized in [*R. v. Floate*](#), 2001 ABPC 250, at paragraph 7:

“The purpose of notice of a Charter Application is to ensure a fair trial and an expeditious trial. It is to allow the Crown an opportunity to marshal its evidence and ask questions of its witnesses to deal with the Charter issue. It is to allow them an opportunity to call evidence relating to the Charter they would normally have called. It is also to give the Court notice of the issue so it can view the evidence as it is presented knowing the issue and to be prepared by reading cases beforehand that deal with the issue and which counsel will rely upon and in that way expedite the trial process rather than delay by adjournments to review evidence and cases²².”

Justice Jamie Campbell commented on the purpose of the notice period set out in the Provincial Court Rules in [*R. v. Doncaster*](#).²³ Their purpose is to prevent “litigation by ambush,” by permitting both parties with an opportunity to respond to the application, file the appropriate materials, and avoid unnecessary adjournments.²⁴

The Alberta Court of Appeal in *R. v. Dwernychuk* described at paragraph 12 the benefit notice has on the Court hearing the Application:

“It enables the judge, with the help of both counsel, to begin to read relevant cases and to put his or her thoughts in order, rather than becoming aware of the existence and nature of a Charter issue only after he or she has heard the evidence without realizing what he or she should be listening for and without being able to exercise his or her limited right to ask questions of witnesses. If such notice is given, the judge is better able to reach a rational decision which is based on a calm reading and serene appreciation of the law, rather than having to reach a decision, perhaps without due consideration, because of the inexorable pressure of his or her docket.”²⁵

It should be kept in mind that *Charter* issues may sometimes arise mid-trial. In those circumstances, notice to the other party will not be possible. Both parties may benefit from requesting that the trial judge hear closing arguments in writing. That way, the parties will have the best opportunity to address the *Charter* issues.

Sufficiency of Notice

Sufficient notice means:

1. It is provided in writing to the Crown and to the Court;
2. It lists the sections of the *Charter* alleged to have been breached;
3. It describes the nature of the *Charter* violation;
4. It provides for an evidentiary basis for the *Charter* violation, including an outline of the facts grounding the application. It must be in sufficient detail to disclose a breach, allow a response to the allegations, and allow the Court to determine if it should hear evidence on the application.²⁶
5. It should outline the remedy being sought, including a list of evidence the Applicant seeks to exclude, if applicable; and
6. A list of cases to be relied on by Applicant in support of the Application.²⁷

Consequences of Insufficient Notice

If an Applicant fails to file sufficient notice of an Application, several alternatives can reasonably be anticipated:

(1) The application could proceed, with minimal notice to the Crown and to the Court, or in the absence of the supporting materials required by the Rules of Court and the common law. That would give the Applicant the “tactical advantage of surprise, which is one of the very things that the rules are intended to prevent.”²⁸

(2) The Crown could be granted an adjournment. Courts have a discretion to grant or deny requests for an adjournment. While a court is arguably without jurisdiction to hear and determine a *Charter* Application unless the notice has been properly provided, it has the discretion to adjourn the proceedings in order to facilitate belated compliance with that requirement. That is another thing the rules are intended to prevent.

In deciding whether to grant an adjournment, Court must bear in mind the potential importance of *Charter* Applications. A litigant’s right to make such an application in a trial forum will not be denied lightly²⁹. However, the legal environment has changed considerably since the decision in the early *Charter* notice cases, like *Kutynechuk*. Both the common law, regulatory provisions, and Rules of Court governing *Charter* Applications unambiguously dictate that proper notice be given. Moreover, the harmful effects of delay are manifesting themselves in increases to lead times and length of proceedings.

(3) The Application could be dismissed because of untimely or inadequate notice.³⁰

NOTES

¹ NSBS, *Code of Professional Conduct*, Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers’ Society, 2012, rule 3.1-2.

² *R. v. Charette*, supra note 13, at para. 45; *R. v. Gundy (2008)*, 231 C.C.C. (3d) 26 (Ont. C.A.), at paras. 19-24 and 50; *R. v. Dwernychuk*, infra, note 21, at paras. 12-14.

³ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act, 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c. 11, s. 24(1).

4 Ibid., s. 24(2).

5 *R. v. Mills* (1986), 52 C.R. (3d) 1 (S.C.C.).

6 Ibid., at p. 19. A Provincial Court judge therefore has no *Charter* jurisdiction respecting an indictable offence before election. See *R. v. Wilson* (1997), 121 C.C.C. (3d) 92 (N.S.C.A.).

7 *R. v. Mills*, supra note 4; *R. v. Hynes* (2001), 47 C.R. (5th) 278 (S.C.C.).

8 *United States v. Kwok*, [2001] 1 S.C.R. 532. Arbour J. for the Court confirmed jurisdiction under the new *Extradition Act* over matters relevant to extradition hearings. These include s. 7 rights, but not s. 6 mobility rights which arise under the Minister's surrender jurisdiction.

9 *Mooring v. National Parole Board* (1996), 45 C.R. (4th) 265 (S.C.C.).

10 *R. v. Menard* (2008), 63 C.R. (6th) 211 (B.C.C.A.).

11 *R. v. Hape* (2007), 47 C.R. (6th) 96 (S.C.C.).

12 *Khadr v. Canada (Minister of Justice)* (2008), 56 C.R. (6th) 255 (S.C.C.). See too *Canada v. Khadr*, [2010] 1 S.C.R. 44 (S.C.C.).

13 The Court stated the police have no legal authority to question people who are doing nothing wrong, nor demand their IDs. Both the majority and dissent recognized that a person may experience a police interaction differently due to their race and existing relations between the police and various racial groups. The majority also accepted a position advanced by us stating even a short interaction with the police can have a significant impact on an individual and can be considered a form of detention.

14 Other preconditions include that the samples have to be provided in an approved container or instrument, and the instrument has to be operated by a properly qualified technician, and the demand has been made upon "reasonable grounds."

15 *Rilling v. The Queen*, [1976] 2 S.C.R. 183 (S.C.C.); *R. v. Alex*, 2017 SCC 37; *R. v. Bernshaw*, [1995] 1 S.C.R. 254 (S.C.C.), at para. 42; and *R. v. Charette*, 2009 ONCA 310.

16 *R. v. MacLennan*, [1995] N.S.J. No. 77 (N.S.C.A.), at para. 58.

17 *R. v. Alex*, supra note 13, at para. 11.

18 *Constitutional Questions Act, R.S.N.S 1989, c. 89*, ss. 10(2).

19 Ibid., at s. 10(4). Provincial statutory notice requirements have been held to be constitutionally within the provincial power over the administration of justice under section 92(14) of the *Constitution Act of 1867*; *McGillivray v. Manitoba* (1989), 51 C.C.C. (3d) 60 (Man. Q.B.).

20 *Provincial Court Rules, s. 3.1(1)*.

21 Ibid., s. 2.4(1). See also the *Provincial Court Practice Directive No. 2*.

22 *R. v. Floate*, 2001 ABPC 250, at para. 7. See also: *R. v. Mousseau*, 2002 ABQB 150, at para. 8; *R. v. Dwernychuk* (1992), 77 C.C.C. (3d) 385 (Alta. C.A.)., *R. v. McNab*, 1999 ABPC 85, at paras 11 and 12; *R. v. Doncaster*, 2013 NSPC 13, at para. 9; *R. v. Blom* (2002), 6 C.R. (6th) 181 (Ont. C.A.); *R. v. Kutynec* (1992), 70 C.C.C. (3d) 289 (Ont. C.A.), at para. 9.

23 *R. v. Doncaster*, supra note 21.

24 Ibid., at para. 9.

25 *R. v. Dwernychuk*, supra note 9, at para. 12.

26 If the Applicant fails to advance a sufficient basis for the *Charter* Application, the application may be dismissed without hearing evidence: *R. v. Kutynec*, supra note 9, at paras. 21 and 22.

27 See *Provincial Court Rules Practice Direction— “Charter Applications,” (PC Rule 2)*. See also: *R. v. Dwernychuk*, supra note 21, at paras. 25-28; *R. v. Kutynec*, supra note 21, at para. 36;

28 *R. v. Doncaster*, supra note 9, at para. 14.

30 *R. v. Loveman* (1992), 71 C.C.C. (3d) 123 (Ont. C.A.).

31 *R. v. Kutynec*, supra note 21, at paras. 21 and 22.

Approved by Council on January 26, 2024.

Standards

- ▶ #1 – Withdrawal as Counsel
- ▶ #2 – Lawyers' Competence
- ▶ #3 – Defence Obligations
Regarding Disclosure
- ▶ #4 – Withdrawal of Guilty Plea
- ▶ #5 – Cultural Competence
- ▶ #6 – Charter Applications

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#7 – Guilty Plea

LIANS » Standards » Criminal Law Standards » #7 – Guilty Plea

Standard

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused's guilty plea is voluntary, unequivocal and informed, and that the admitted facts support the charge.¹

To be informed, defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands:

- 1) that the plea is an admission of the essential elements of the offence;
- 2) the nature of the plea having regard to the waiver of the right to a trial;
- 3) the criminal consequences of the plea;
- 4) the legally relevant collateral consequences of the plea,² and,
- 5) that the court is not bound by any agreement between the accused and the prosecutor.

Commentary

I) A VOLUNTARY PLEA

As summarized by Hill, J. in *R. v. Moser*, [\[2002\] O.J. No. 552 \(S.C.J.\)](#), at para. 33:

A plea of guilty must be voluntary in the sense that the plea is a conscious volitional decision of the accused to plead guilty for those reasons which [they] regard... as appropriate...

...Ordinarily a plea of guilty involves certain inherent and external pressures... Plea negotiations in which the prosecution pursues a plea of guilty in exchange for forgoing legal avenues open to it, or agrees not to pursue certain charges, do not render the subsequent plea involuntary...

...What is unacceptable is coercive or oppressive conduct of others or any circumstance personal to the individual which unfairly deprives the accused of free choice in the decision not to go to trial...

...There is, of course, no closed list of circumstances calling into question the voluntariness of a guilty plea: pressure from the court...; pressure from defence counsel...; cognitive impairment or emotional disintegration of the accused...; effect of illicit drugs or prescribed medications... (citations omitted)

As noted by a unanimous Court of Appeal in *R. v. Cherrington*, [\[2018\] O.J. No. 4012](#) at para. 21:

...To enter a voluntary plea of guilty, an accused need only be able to understand the process leading to the plea, communicate with counsel, and make an active or conscious choice. Whether the choice to plead guilty is wise, rational or in the accused's best interest is not part of the inquiry...

The final decision not to proceed to trial rests with the accused and must be an exercise of their own free will. As the majority of the Supreme Court of Canada states in *Wong*, *supra*, at para. 11:



The decision to plead guilty reflects deeply personal considerations, including subjective levels of risk tolerance, priorities, family and employment circumstances, and individual idiosyncrasies. For this reason, it is one of the few steps in the criminal process where defence counsel are ethically required to seek their client's direct instruction (R. v. G.D.B., [2000 SCC 22](#), [2000] 1 S.C.R. 520, at para. 34).

Defence counsel should also be mindful to consider all the accused's circumstances to ensure the plea is voluntary, including, but not limited to, the accused's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disabilities such as mental health issues, intellectual disabilities and substance abuse issues.

II) AN UNEQUIVOCAL PLEA

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused's intention to enter a plea of guilty is clear. There is no room for doubt, misunderstanding, or confusion.

As Hill, J. states in *R. v. Moser*, [\[2002\] O.J. No. 552 \(S.C.J.\)](#) at para. 32:

To be valid, the plea must be unequivocal – the circumstances should not be such that the plea was unintended or confusing, qualified, modified, or uncertain in terms of the accused's acknowledgement of the essential legal elements of the crime charged...

III) AN INFORMED PLEA

Understanding that the Plea is an Admission of the Essential Elements of the Offence

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands that the plea is an admission to the essential elements of the offence.

Model jury instructions may be of assistance when drawing the accused's attention to the requisite conduct and the associated mental element.

Understanding the Nature of the Plea Having Regard to the Waiver of the Right to a Trial

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands that by pleading guilty they are giving up their right to a trial before an independent and impartial tribunal, including a trial before a Supreme Court judge sitting with a jury if the accused has an election available with respect to the mode of trial.

The right to a trial encompasses fundamental procedural safeguards, including: i) The presumption of innocence; ii) The burden on the Crown to prove the allegation; iii) The high standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt; iv) The right to make full answer and defence, and v) The right against self-incrimination.


The accused's decision not to proceed to trial and to waive all potential defences is informed by counsel's analysis of the case for the prosecution.³ When reviewing the disclosure materials counsel considers any potential defences and Charter remedies. Counsel also considers any information provided by the accused, and any issues specific to racialized accused,⁴ when making this assessment.

The accused may want to enter a guilty plea before counsel has had an opportunity to obtain full disclosure. There is nothing preventing counsel from assisting a client in such a situation. It may be in a client's best interests to resolve the matter quickly before the prosecution has had an opportunity to disclose all relevant material.

If the accused wants to enter a guilty plea in the absence of full disclosure, counsel should explain that their assessment of the case is qualified to the extent that disclosure is incomplete and that the accused has a right to disclosure of the complete investigative file before moving forward with their plea. As Justice Di Luca states in *R. v. Cherry*, [\[2018\] O.J. No. 4928 \(S.C.J.\)](#) at para. 24:

...In many routine cases, initial disclosure provided for the purpose of a bail hearing can be a sufficient basis upon which counsel can form a tentative opinion about a case sufficient to advise a client on the plea — subject of course to a caveat that full disclosure could change counsel's views. In cases where a client wishes to proceed and is prepared to admit the essential facts in support of the plea, counsel can assist in negotiating and entering a plea.

Understanding the Criminal Consequences of the Plea

Counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands that the next stage of the proceeding will be a sentencing 

hearing, having regard to:

-The imposition of a punishment by the Judge, with an associated record,

and

-Any applicable ancillary orders that the Judge may/shall impose, such as:

- o A DNA order;
- o A restitution order;
- o A forfeiture order;
- o A weapons prohibition order;
- o A sex offender registration order;
- o An order prohibiting or limiting contact with young persons;
- o A driving prohibition order, and/or,
- o A victim fine surcharge.

When discussing the sentencing process, counsel should be alert to the availability of resources that may be of assistance to the accused, including pre-sentence reports, Gladue reports for Indigenous clients, Impact of Race and Cultural Assessments for African Nova Scotians or Black clients, reports from the accused's mental health professional or social worker or from advocacy organizations like the Canadian Mental Health Association, Inclusion Nova Scotia, and People First Nova Scotia.

Understanding the Legally Relevant Collateral Consequences of the Plea

In *R. v. Wong*, supra, the Court affirms that defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands the legally relevant collateral consequences that may flow from the sentence outside of the criminal justice process. The Court defines immigration consequences as a legally relevant collateral consequence (para. 4).

The Court declined to provide a closed list of other legally relevant consequences or their necessary prerequisites.

The Court directs practitioners to adopt a broad, rather than a narrow or restrictive, approach to the assessment of legally relevant secondary consequences (para. 9). The Court provides the following additional guidance:

- “A legally relevant consequence is one which bears on sufficiently serious legal interests of the accused.” (para. 4); and
- “...a legally relevant collateral consequence will typically be state-imposed, flow from conviction or sentence, and impact serious interests of the accused.” (para. 9).

It is important to remember that the type, duration and severity of sentence may be experienced differently depending on the accused's personal circumstances. It is important for defence counsel to take these personal circumstances into account.

Understanding the Court is Not Bound by Any Agreement Made Between the Accused and the Prosecutor

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused understands that it is the Judge who makes the final decision with respect to the appropriate punishment and that the Judge is not bound by any agreement made between the accused and the prosecutor.

The accused is not permitted to withdraw their guilty plea and proceed to trial if they do not like the Judge's decision with respect to punishment.

Cases to consider:

R. v. Anthony-Cook, [2016 SCC 43](#) – The leading case on joint submissions in Canada.

IV) THE FACTS SUPPORT THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE CHARGE

Defence counsel must be satisfied that the accused admits sufficient factual circumstances to support the essential elements of the charge.



As Justice Watt states, speaking for a unanimous Court of Appeal in *R. v. D.M.G.*, [2011 ONCA 343](#) at para. 57, “[t]o admit something is to accept it as valid or as true.”

It is permissible for counsel to assist an accused who admits facts in the absence of memory. If, for example, a third party witnesses the accused commit an offence, but the accused does not remember it, the accused can admit the offence even if the accused does not remember committing the offence.

It is not permissible for counsel to assist an accused who proclaims innocence yet wants to admit facts to the contrary.⁵

If the accused subsequently makes an application for parole, the National Parole Board will consider the admitted factual circumstances in deciding whether early release is appropriate.

The admitted factual circumstances may also be important with respect to related civil, immigration, family or other additional legal proceedings. Defence counsel should encourage the accused to seek independent legal advice if the circumstances warrant.

The scope of the factual admissions is often a subject of negotiation between defence counsel and the prosecution.

When the accused is tendering a plea of guilty it is a matter of good practice for defence counsel to alert the prosecution as to whether there are any factual circumstances that the accused is not prepared to admit. For example, the accused may be prepared to admit facts that support the essential elements of the charge, but deny other information that may be embarrassing or aggravating in nature. The prosecution will then be in a position to decide whether to call evidence to prove a contested fact and to ensure that sufficient time is set aside for the sentencing hearing.

Cases to consider:

R. v. Gardiner, [1982] S.C.J. No. 71 – The Crown must prove any disputed aggravating facts beyond a reasonable doubt at a sentencing hearing.

See also section 724(3) of the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

BEST PRACTICES

Prior to Court

Counsel should be mindful to ensure that the police have not overcharged in a way that might pressure the accused into accepting a plea bargain.⁶

Defence counsel must be alert to any communication barriers and arrange for an interpreter, if necessary.

Defence counsel must be mindful that an accused's disability may be a potential barrier to meaningful communication.

Defence counsel must also be sensitive to cultural factors as potential barriers to meaningful communication. For example, Angela Bressan and Kyle Coady in “[Guilty Pleas Among Indigenous People in Canada](#)”, Research and Statistics Division, 2017, state at page 7:

“Indigenous people may have unique cultural considerations for pleading guilty, including language barriers and values around reconciliation and taking responsibility. The words ‘guilty’ and ‘innocent’ do not translate in many Indigenous languages, and one can interpret the question ‘How do you plead’ guilty or not guilty?” as “Are you being blamed?”...Other cultural considerations include the Indigenous phenomenon of ‘gratuitous concurrence’, that is “when a person appears to assent to every proposition put to them even when they do not agree”...

Defence counsel may want to utilize a direction that includes the admitted factual circumstances when the accused wants to enter a plea of guilty.

A direction helps to avoid any misunderstanding between defence counsel and the accused.



A direction also adds a degree of solemnity to the process and serves to emphasize the serious nature of the course of action that the accused is contemplating.

Sample Direction

A sample direction is attached for defence counsel to draw upon when tailoring a direction specific to the accused's case.

In Court

Defence counsel must be alert to any communication barriers and request an interpreter, when necessary, including in a circumstance where an accused has sensory impairments and needs an interpreter.

When the accused tenders a plea of guilty, the Judge may ask counsel: "Have you reviewed section 606(1.1) with your client?"

For ease of reference, section 606(1.1) states:

A court may accept a plea of guilty only if it is satisfied that the accused
(a) is making the plea voluntarily; and
(b) understands
(i) that the plea is an admission of the essential elements of the offence,
(ii) the nature and consequences of the plea, and
(iii) that the court is not bound by any agreement made between the accused and the prosecutor; and
(c) the facts support the charge.

It is a matter of good practice for defence counsel to request that the Judge confirm a guilty plea directly with the accused. As the Honourable Justice Richard A. Saull states:

...it is unwise for a plea to be made by counsel on behalf of the accused instead of by the accused himself. This simply invites the question that may arise during the course of the sentencing itself or at a later appeal of whether the accused actually intended to plead guilty. At this crucial stage of the criminal proceedings, with so much at stake, why would a judge allow counsel to conduct the inquiry in open court or to simply advise the court that the inquiry had already been made with their client? A few simple questions put to the accused by the court can go a long way to preventing a later suggestion that the accused's plea was not properly taken. (Striking a Guilty Plea, National Criminal Law Program, Quebec City, Quebec, July, 2011, at page 3)

As Hill, J. states in *R. v. Moser*, [2002] O.J. No. 552 (S.C.J.) at para. 32:

...The accused's personal entry of the plea is a factor tending to demonstrate the unequivocal character of the plea...

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service – DPP Directive – “Resolution Discussions and Agreements”](#)

Sample Direction

I understand that it is alleged that I have committed the following criminal offence:
(Offence) – (Date of Offence) – (Jurisdiction of Offence)

I have had an opportunity to review the disclosure materials.

["At this time, I have only been able to consult with a lawyer based on a summary of the Crown's evidence against me. I have a right to know in advance of the trial what evidence the Crown has against me and to wait for complete disclosure (the full file of all the evidence against me) to speak with a lawyer about the complete case. This could allow me to learn whether there are any weaknesses...in the Crown's case against me or whether there are any defence(s) to this charge. I am giving up this right." (Legal Aid Ontario Plea Comprehension Inquiry)]

I have had sufficient time to consider all my options.

I understand that I have the right to a trial to contest the allegation.



I understand that at a trial the prosecution bears the burden of proving the charge against me beyond a reasonable doubt.

*I understand that by entering a plea of guilty I am giving up my right to a trial.
I want to enter a plea of guilty.*

I accept responsibility for committing the offence.

I admit the factual circumstances in the attached Agreement Statement of Facts.

I am making this decision to enter a plea of guilty voluntarily. No one is pressuring me or forcing me to plead guilty. I am entering a plea of guilty of my own free will.

I understand that by entering a plea of guilty I will have a criminal record of conviction in relation to this charge.

I understand that I will be eligible for a record suspension (formerly known as a pardon) _ years after I complete my sentence.

[or]

I understand that I will not be eligible for a record suspension (formerly known as a pardon) in relation to this conviction.

I understand that if the Judge grants a conditional discharge the criminal record of the discharge will remain accessible in a criminal record check for a period of three years from the date that the Judge grants the discharge.

I understand that if the Judge grants an absolute discharge the criminal record of the discharge will remain accessible in a criminal record check for a period of one year from the date that the Judge grants the discharge.

I understand that by pleading guilty I will receive a punishment to be determined by the Judge.

I understand that it is the Judge, not my lawyer and not the Crown Attorney, who determines the appropriate punishment. Stated differently, I understand that the Judge makes the final decision as to the appropriate punishment in my case.

I understand that the Judge will also impose the following (ancillary) orders at the time of sentencing: 1)....; 2); and 3)....

I understand that the Judge may impose the following (ancillary) orders at the time of sentencing: 1)....; 2); and 3)....

Footnotes

1 *R. v. Wong*, [2018 SCC 25](#) at para. 3; [Criminal Code of Canada](#), s. 606 (1.1); [Youth Criminal Justice Act](#) s. 36; Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, [Code of Professional Conduct](#), Halifax: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2012: rule 5.1-8.

2 *Wong*, *Ibid*, at paras. 3 – 4.

3 For example, section 5.1-8 of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, *Code of Professional Conduct* states “A lawyer for an accused or potential accused may enter into an agreement with the prosecutor about a guilty plea, if, following investigation, (a) the lawyer advises (their) client about the prospects for an acquittal or finding of guilt.”

4 For example, assessing psychological detention in the context of relations between the police and racialized communities (*R. v. Le*, [2019 SCC 34](#) at para. 75).

5 See Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, *Code of Professional Conduct*, (Halifax, Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2011) ch 5.1-7-5.1-8: The Lawyer as Advocate: Agreement on Guilty Plea <https://nsbs.org/legal-profession/code-of-professional-conduct/chapter-5-relationship-to-the-administration-of-justice/#14-agreement-on-guilty-plea> as well as ch 3.7-7 Withdrawal From Representation: Obligatory Withdrawal <https://nsbs.org/legal-profession/code-of-professional-conduct/chapter-3-relationship-to-clients/#98-37-withdrawal-from-representation>.



6 FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE Canada, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Heads of Prosecutions Subcommittee on the Prevention of Wrongful Convictions, *Innocence at Stake: The Need for Continued Vigilance to Prevent Wrongful Convictions in Canada*, (Ottawa: Public Prosecution Service of Canada, 2018) at Chapter 8 – False Guilty Pleas online: <https://www.ppsc-sppc.gc.ca/eng/pub/is-ip/ch8.html>

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Standards

- ▶ #1 – Withdrawal as Counsel
- ▶ #2 – Lawyers' Competence
- ▶ #3 – Defence Obligations
Regarding Disclosure
- ▶ #4 – Withdrawal of Guilty Plea
- ▶ #5 – Cultural Competence
- ▶ #6 – Charter Applications
- ▶ #7 – Guilty Plea

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