

Chapter 8

Do not use this guide for legal advice. It provides information only, and that information only applies to British Columbian law, services, and benefits. Consult with a lawyer for advice related to your specific situation. Laws, benefits, policies, and procedures are always changing. Always double-check the information you intend to rely on with the appropriate agency or with your lawyer. Indigenous people's traditions and customary laws are outside the scope of this guide; however, we want to acknowledge those customs and traditions and emphasize that nothing in this guide should be misinterpreted as superseding or taking away from them.

Getting Legal Help

Decisions you make about legal issues are very important, and a lawyer can help you understand your options and risks, as well as how your choices will affect your family. It is always a good idea to consult with a lawyer before making a major legal decision. Sometimes you can qualify for free help from a lawyer through legal aid. (Information and referral services are free to everyone, while advice services are free for people with low incomes.)

It is also important to know there are other people who may be able to help you through your legal matter, such as legal advocates. This section of the guide will provide information about the following:

Lawyers	Legal aid	Advocates
What are some tips to help me work best with my lawyer?	What is legal aid?	What is an advocate?
What can I expect from my lawyer?	Do I qualify for legal aid?	How can I find a legal advocate?
How can I find the right lawyer for me?	If I do not qualify, what other free legal resources are available to me?	How can I advocate for my grandchild myself?

If your family and/or your grandchild is Aboriginal, you can also look at the end of this section for resources that can help with the particular legal and cultural issues that your family might face.

Legal aid

A significant amount of the information in this section was taken from the website of the Legal Services Society of BC. Go to www.legalaid.bc.ca/ to learn more about legal aid.

Legal aid could be a good place for you to start your search for legal help. All of the services are free, and even if you do not qualify for a lawyer's services, you may be eligible for other forms of help, such as free legal advice or free information. This advice and information could help

you represent yourself, or it could help you get the most out of the services of a lawyer you hire yourself.

In British Columbia, legal aid is provided by the Legal Services Society (LSS), an independent, non-profit organization with a range of free services. Even if you do not think you qualify for legal aid, LSS encourages you to apply anyway as they may be able to help you find legal assistance even if you do not qualify for legal aid.

Free legal aid services include:

- Legal information from [legal information outreach workers](#) and [Family LawLINE](#) staff, [publications](#) on legal topics in many languages and the Family Law in BC website <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca/>). This legal information is free for everyone, no matter what your income is.
- Legal advice [from family advice lawyers](#) who are located at several [family justice centres](#), the lawyers and paralegals on [Family LawLINE](#), and duty counsel[(Duty counsel are lawyers who are located at most courthouses; if you qualify they are available to give you free legal advice, assist with paperwork, and they can sometimes speak for you in court. However, their help is informal and they do not take on cases long-term. For more info on duty counsel go to http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca/help/who_FamilyDutyCounsel.php
- Legal representation from a lawyer – for those who qualify and have serious family, child protection, or criminal law issues. For advice on how to work with a lawyer see below in this chapter.

Free legal representation

To have a legal aid lawyer represent you, your net household income and assets must be at or below the levels in the table below. These guidelines apply to all types of cases, including appeals.

Your income might be lower than you think, since some income does not count. Only a trained legal intake assistant can really figure out whether you are financially eligible, so do apply.

Income limits for getting legal representation (a lawyer)

Household size (number of family members)	Net monthly income (after taxes and other deductions)
1	\$1,480
2	\$2,070
3	\$2,670

4	\$3,260
5	\$3,850
7 or more	\$5,040

This table is current as of April 2014, and could change. Check [LSS Website](#) for the most up-to-date figures:

http://legalaid.bc.ca/legal_aid/dolQualifyRepresentation.php

Keep in mind that the amount of time you will get with the lawyer will be limited. In your first meeting, try to find ways in which you can maximize this time, such as working with an advocate or helping with the case yourself. There is more information on this below.

If you are age 55 or older you may also be able to get legal representation or advice from the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support (BC CEAS). Phone 1-866-437-1940. They cannot assist you with family law matters but can assist with other legal problems such as debt, residential tenancy issues and pensions. More on BC CEAS here: <http://bcceas.ca/programs/legal-programs/>

Free legal *advice*

If you do not qualify for legal representation by a legal aid lawyer but you are still low-income, you may still be eligible for free legal advice services from:

- duty counsel at most courthouses,
- family advice lawyers (you will need a referral from a family justice counsellor or a child support officer), and
- a family lawyer via [Family LawLINE](#), a free phone service that helps people with family legal issues who do not qualify for legal representation. Information and referral services are free to everyone, while advice services are free for people with low incomes (see table below for the income rules).

[Family LawLINE](#)

Lower Mainland: 604-408-2172

Elsewhere in BC: 1-866-577-2525 (toll-free)

Hours: 9:30 a.m.–3:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.

9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Wednesday

To be eligible for most legal advice from LSS, your net monthly household income must be below the levels shown in the table below.

Income limits for getting legal advice

Household size (number of family members)	Net monthly income (after taxes and other deductions)
1-4	\$3,265
5	\$3,860
6	\$4,470
7 or more	\$5,055

This table is current as of April 2014, and could change. Check [LSS Website](#) for the most up-to-date figures:

http://legalaid.bc.ca/legal_aid/dolQualifyRepresentation.php

If your income is slightly higher than the limits shown above, there is a chance you might still qualify for the services described there. You should contact LSS to see what you are eligible for.

Free legal information

If you do not qualify for any of the services in the sections above (legal advice or legal representation), you can still access free legal information from LSS such as:

- [Legal information outreach workers](#) who provide help in person. To contact one, call the [Family LawLINE](#) on 604-408-2172 (Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-577-2525 (call no charge, elsewhere in BC) or the legal aid office closest to you.
- [Family LawLINE](#) (see above).
- The Family Law website: <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca>, which has a great deal of useful information about family law, the courts, and legal procedures. It also has links to court forms and legislation.

Look at the end of this chapter for a list of other very useful sources of legal information.

How to apply for legal aid

If you would like to apply for legal aid, visit a legal aid office (to apply in person) or call the [LSS Call Centre](#) (to apply over the phone). See the section '(state section and page no' below for contact information. It is helpful if you have all your financial and court information on hand when you phone. You will need to provide:

- At least two recent pay stubs,
- A recent welfare stub, or

- A recent income tax return or bank records (if you are self-employed or seasonally employed).

The legal intake assistant may ask for more information to figure out whether you qualify.

You will also need to bring:

- Proof of value of your assets – like a car, boat, home, or RRSP, and
- Any papers you have regarding your matter – like court orders.

Legal aid lawyers have limits to how much time they can spend on your case and what expenses are covered. Ask for information about those limits at the very beginning.

Working with a lawyer

Some of the information in this section is from the following sources (to read more, go to these websites):

- ✓ Family Law in BC - <http://familylaw.lss.bc.ca/>.
- ✓ The Law Centre - http://thelawcentre.ca/first_interview and
- ✓ The Law Society of BC - <http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/page.cfm?cid=8>

How to find a lawyer

Keep in mind that your first meeting with a lawyer does not commit you to staying with that lawyer – if you are paying the legal fees, it is common to shop around to find the right fit. This may be impossible with legal aid, since in some communities there is only one lawyer who takes legal aid cases. When you apply for legal aid, ask about what can happen if you want to change lawyers.

(Occasionally, especially in smaller communities, there is a problem when the person on the other side of your court case has already consulted with many lawyers in your area to keep you from being able to hire any of them. Legal aid has some policies in place to deal with this situation, but private lawyers might not be able to consider taking your case. If you find yourself in this situation, try to find an advocate for help (see below in this chapter).

Whether you qualify for services from a legal aid lawyer or hire a lawyer yourself, it is important that you find someone who works well with you. You will need a lawyer who is right for your situation, because grandparent caregivers often have unique legal problems. You will want to look for a family lawyer who has experience in areas such as guardianship and adoption.

In many smaller communities across the province, there may be few or no family or legal aid lawyers. This limits your choice of lawyer and might mean that you have to hire a lawyer who doesn't live in your area. The long-distance lawyer/client relationship can make things more difficult. If there are advocates in your community, they might help you find a lawyer or help you to navigate the system instead of a lawyer (see the section on Advocates below in this chapter).

A good way to find a lawyer is to get a personal recommendation from family, friends, co-workers, local community agencies or counselling services. Also, if you belong to a support group, other members may have names of lawyers who regularly work with the particular issues you face.

If you do not know anyone in your community you could ask, you can call the [Lawyer Referral Service](#). It is a free program that can put you in touch with lawyers who have experience in the field of law that relates to you problem. Through this service, you can get a consultation with a lawyer for up to 30 minutes for a fee of only \$25, plus taxes.

Lawyer Referral Service

The Lawyer Referral Service operates by telephone.

You can call during business hours, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday - Friday at 604.687.3221 or toll free 1.800.663.1919.

For more information visit <http://www.cbabc.org/For-the-Public/Lawyer-Referral-Service>

If you know the name of a lawyer you would like to consult but do not have their contact information, you can use the Lawyer Lookup service of the Law Society of BC. Go to <http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca>. (Link to Lookup Service is on upper right hand side).

What to expect from your lawyer

People usually need a lawyer during the most emotional times of their lives. You may feel helpless, overwhelmed, angry, or frustrated by having to go through a family crisis and navigate the court system at the same time. For that reason, it is helpful to know a few tips on how to get the most out of the time you spend with your lawyer. There are different tips depending on whether you are eligible for a legal aid lawyer or you hire a private lawyer yourself.

The information below applies not just to a private lawyer you hire yourself, but also to legal aid lawyers.

- A lawyer's job is to explain the law and your legal options to you. Lawyers do not make decisions for you; they review your situation and offer suggestions on what you can do.

- Lawyers act on behalf of their clients. They should listen to what you say, and do what you decide to do. Remember that the lawyer is working for you.
- Anything you tell your lawyer is confidential and your lawyer cannot share your information without your consent. This includes any information you share, both for the purpose of getting legal advice and for other purposes.
- There is one exception to this rule about confidentiality: if you tell your lawyer that you believe a child or adult is being, or will be abused in the future, the lawyer may report this for the protection of the other person.
- Your lawyer can help with legal advice only. If you need emotional support, you may want to talk to a friend, an advocate, or a counsellor.

How to prepare for your appointment

A lawyer will need information about you and your situation in order to give you proper legal advice. If you have arranged to meet with a lawyer, you need to:

- Bring with you all court documents you have that relate to your case, such as a custody order or any new application.
- Take a list of questions, extra paper, and a pen so that you can write down the answers to the questions that you have.
- Have an idea of what outcome you would like to reach at the end of your meeting.
- Organize and bring any documents you think may help. If possible, bring a copy for the lawyer to keep, since that will save time and money.

Also try to have the following with you:

- Identification with your full name and address (tell the lawyer if you do not want this information given to anyone else)
- Full names, birth dates and current addresses of your child and grandchild
- Information about your income and everything you know about your grandchild's parents' income
- A list of incidents that explain any need for a protection or custody order (for example, specific dates, times, and places of physical or mental abuse, child abuse, or neglect)

Questions to ask the lawyer

If your lawyer's services have been provided by legal aid: *What are the time and cost limits?*

If you have hired the lawyer yourself: *How much will it cost, and when will I have to pay?* In the first interview, ask the lawyer how much your bill will be and if there will be any additional expenses. Tell your lawyer you want to be kept informed about costs as the case goes on. You are entitled to get a detailed bill before you pay. Some lawyers will agree to wait until your case

ends before getting payment from you. How and when you pay can be negotiated. If you think your lawyer charged too much, you can have a District Registrar review the bill (see below for more information).

What do I need to support my case? Ask what evidence you will need to gather to support your case. For example, you may need to get receipts from a daycare centre or statements from witnesses.

What can you help with? Ask your lawyer to explain what help he or she can provide and what steps are involved. For example, you may want the lawyer's help to draft your affidavit or to reply to a court order application.

How long will it take? Ask if there might be delays and how these can be avoided or reduced.

What are my chances of success? Ask what factors may impact on your chance of success.

Can I have copies for my own files? Keep copies of all documents and correspondence relating to your case, and keep them on hand in your own file. Ask how much copies will cost.

How and when will I hear back from you? Find out when and how often your lawyer will be in touch to inform you about how your case is progressing.

Make the most of your lawyer's time

Whether you hired the lawyer yourself or you have to keep within the legal aid time limits, these strategies will help you to make the most out of the time you get with your lawyer.

- Think ahead of time about how you will describe your problem. It is best if you have a clear idea of the history of the situation before you see your lawyer. The appointment may be time-limited, so you need to tell your story in a way that is clear and quick. Write down basic details of your legal matter ahead of time, setting out the facts in chronological order. Bring a copy for the lawyer to keep.
- The lawyer is not there to judge you and can only give you advice based on the information you provide. If you leave out important information, the advice the lawyer gives may be wrong for your situation. You might have wasted time, money, and perhaps even made your situation worse.
- Before each meeting, be prepared. Make sure you have all your documents in order and that you have read over anything your lawyer has sent you.
- Keep your communications to the point, and be organized. Do not spend time discussing issues unrelated to your legal matter. Remember, the lawyer will bill you for phone calls as well as the time it takes to read notes and documents.
- After you have explained your problem, ask the lawyer to tell you about your options. If you do not understand something, ask. Take the time to think things over while you are there to make sure you leave with a clear understanding of what your options are.

- Get to know your lawyer’s assistants. If a secretary, paralegal, articling student, or junior lawyer can help you, contact that person instead of the most senior lawyer – their time is less expensive.
- Find out if your expectations are reasonable. Ask your lawyer for an opinion concerning your chances of success, and find out about your options and alternatives. Make sure you and your lawyer agree on your plans and priorities and that your choices are likely to lead to the outcome you want.
- Ask your lawyer to make suggestions about what you can do to save time and money. You may be able to prepare parts of the case on your own or with the help of a legal advocate (see below in this chapter).

If you think a lawyer has overcharged you

If you believe your lawyer overcharged you by a lot, you can have your bill assessed by a third party and potentially reduced. This is called **taxation** of the lawyer’s bill. You must apply to have this done within 12 months of receiving the bill if you have not paid it, or within 3 months of paying the bill. However, **you should only pursue this option** if the amount of the overcharge is fairly high since you **can be forced to pay the lawyer’s costs** to defend against the taxation if the bill is reduced by less than one-sixth (or less than about 17%).

The master or district registrar at your nearest Supreme Court provides this service. (To find the court closest to you, look in the blue pages of your phone book or visit <http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/#>.) The first step is to go to the courthouse and pick up a complaint form, called an appointment form (Form 49). [Also available on line](#). Fill it out and return it to the clerk, along with a filing fee before the deadline. The clerk will give you a court-stamped appointment form with the date and time for the hearing to serve to your lawyer. You will have to attend a hearing, but it will be casual, and you can represent yourself. The district registrar will hear both sides and make a decision, usually pretty quickly, about whether the bill is fair. If the registrar decides to reduce the lawyer’s bill, he or she will issue a legally binding judgment and, if the bill is reduced by at least one-sixth, you will either get a refund or not have to pay as much. If the bill is reduced by less than one-sixth or not reduced at all, you will have to pay your lawyer for the time he or she spent preparing for and attending the taxation hearing

For more information, read or listen to Dial-A-Law script #438:

Dial-A-Law

Lower Mainland: **604-687-4680**

Toll free: **1-800-565-5297**

Website: <http://www.cbabc.org/For-the-Public/Dial-A-Law/Scripts>

Advocates are people who are trained to help you through a complicated situation. Like lawyers, they can explain the system to you and tell you about your legal options. Unlike lawyers, they work for free no matter what your income is, and they can help you in different ways, such as finding support services in your community or going with you to appointments.

A legal advocate is a person who has special training and experience in certain areas of law, such as poverty, child protection, or family disputes. Legal advocates usually work for a non-profit community agency and may have a background in areas such as social work, law, or mediation. Some lawyers appreciate working with an advocate, especially if you are receiving legal aid. The advocate can save you and your lawyer much time and money by assisting with the case.

Some advocates can help you only by phone; some can see you in person. Some advocates can come with you to appointments; some cannot. Advocates differ depending on their training and where they work. All advocates will help define and clarify the problems you are facing, give you information, offer support, and connect you with resources and services. An advocate may also teach you how to advocate for yourself, how to communicate clearly, and how to solve and prevent problems. An advocate may help you find the right lawyer; accompany you to appointments with lawyers, teachers, or social workers; work with you to develop an action plan; help you write letters; help you prepare for court; and help you prepare and complete all of the steps involved in a formal complaint.

Some advocates can help you to change the system itself. They may find others with a similar issue and help you form an action or lobby group. In that case, they might do the necessary publicity and recruitment of participants and allies. They might teach media skills, petition writing, and organizing strategies. They may connect you with provincial or national organizations who share the same concerns or who are already working on changes.

Much of the advice in the section above on working with a lawyer is also useful when working with an advocate. Many advocates work to teach you the skills you will need to advocate for yourself and your family so that you can become more independent. Following are some more tips for working with an advocate:

- Make sure the advocate has access to legal supervision.
- Be aware that conversations with an advocate may not be confidential the way that your conversations with your lawyer are. Discuss limits to confidentiality with your advocate in detail, in case what you tell the advocate could impact your court case.
- Some advocates are also trained counsellors. They may be able to assist in ways that are broader than resolving your legal problem.
- When you contact a potential advocate, ask about the person's credentials, experience, philosophy, and approach. Find out exactly what he or she can do for you and what time is available.

- Look for advocates with experience in your legal situation and a good reputation within the legal and ministry systems

How to find a legal advocate

When you contact a potential advocate, ask about the person’s credentials, experience, philosophy, and approach. Find out exactly what he or she can do for you and what time is available. Look for advocates with experience in your legal situation and a good reputation within the legal and ministry systems.

To find an advocate near you, ask for recommendations from another grandparent, a counsellor, or your lawyer. If you do not get a recommendation, ask at one of the following organizations:

- Your legal aid provider. Legal information outreach workers at the nearest legal aid office can connect you with an advocate in your community. Call and ask to be transferred to the office nearest you:

[Legal Services Society Call Centre](#)

Lower Mainland: **604-408-2172**

Toll free: **1-866-577-2525**

Hours 9-4 Mon-Fri, Wed 9-2:30

- **PovNet, an online resource that connects people to registered advocates in their communities.**

Phone: **604-876-8638**

Website: <http://www.povnet.org/find-an-advocate/bc>

Email: info@povnet.org

- **BC Disabilities Benefits Advocacy Access Program.**

Lower Mainland: **604-872-1278**

Toll free: **1-800-663-1278**

Website: <http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/advocacydb.htm>

- **[VictimLink](#) to find victim advocacy services near you.**

Phone **1-800-563-0808**

VictimLink BC is TTY accessible. Call TTY at 604-875-0885; to call collect, please call the Telus Relay Service at 711. Text at 604-836-6381.

Email VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca

You might have to be creative about finding an advocate if your community does not have a formal advocacy service. Check the front (and yellow pages) of your phone book for a women's centre, family service agency, crisis line, or mental health service and ask for contacts for advocates. You can also search the internet for "advocacy services bc" or "bc advocate" and you will find many suggestions. You might also come into contact with workers at different agencies who do not define themselves as advocates, but may still help you.

For more information about advocates, go to <http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca> and click on "Who can help" on the left side of the screen.

Tips to help you advocate for your grandchild and yourself

Often, grandparents must be advocates for themselves, their grandchildren, and even their adult child. Here are some general tips to consider when you are advocating for your rights and for what is best for your family. You may be involved with any number of systems and individuals, including the ministry and its social workers, welfare officials, school personnel, doctors, therapists, and lawyers.

It is a good idea to keep in mind that we all communicate differently. Whether English is not a person's first language, or their upbringing, culture, and beliefs influence how they interpret another person's words and actions, it is wise to try to look past these differences and find common ground. What is perfectly respectful to one person may be seen as disrespectful to another. Try to summon as much patience as you can: understanding is the goal of all communication, and it can take time.

In this section, you will find tips from an experienced advocate on how to advocate for yourself. You can also see the appendix for a sample of a letter that you can send to an agency or government ministry if you need to ask for services or benefits.

Do your homework

Find out as much as possible about the service, agency, or person you are seeking out ahead of time and learn what is possible under their rules. Learn what the service or government mandate (purpose) is and what to expect. You can learn this by checking websites, brochures, and also by talking to others who have been involved with the service or system, especially those who have had success. If you cannot get this information ahead of time, ask for it in your very first questions.

Make an appointment

Meeting in person usually works best. Make an appointment to show that you are serious, and that you respect the agency's time and your own. When you make the appointment, let the other party know what you want to discuss or learn and whether anyone will come with you (such as an advocate, friend, relative, or child). Find out how much time will be available and then come prepared to be brief and to the point. If you need the person to read material beforehand, make sure to send a copy ahead of time.

Be on time for the appointment. Being on time shows respect. Likely someone has set aside a period of time to meet with you. If you are late, you may lose your opportunity for an in person meeting that day.

Plan ahead

Think about what you want and how you will explain it – briefly – to the person you are meeting. You should also plan an explanation of how your request will help your grandchild and fit with a long-term plan that is in the child's best interests. Bring any documents that explain or support your request (such as quotes from the ministry's own legislation or policy, or a doctor's report). Write out reminders for yourself so that you make sure to cover everything in the meeting.

If your grandchild is old enough to speak in a meeting, plan out ahead of time how best to do that. If children must attend, make sure the words and tone of the discussion will be alright for them to hear. If the children are not there, bring a picture of them to remind everyone involved to stay focused on the children and their best interests.

Take notes

Keep a record of all communication in one book or folder. Date every contact and list what you requested, who was present, what they refused or promised to do, and when they agreed to do it. Sometimes it is worth it to write up a summary of the meeting and give a copy to the other parties. Always keep copies of any material you or they provide. Get all decisions in writing.

Respectfully assert your rights

Be assertive, not aggressive. Be honest and forthright. Do not exaggerate. Be respectful in all of your dealings. Be prepared to listen well, and expect the same in return. Ask questions and clarify to make sure you fully understand. Be patient and persistent. Stay on track. Learn all that you can about your rights. If you make a mistake, simply admit it and move on. Be responsible for your own words and actions. Work towards positive, productive relationships that will support you and your grandchild. Relationship-building takes time and effort. If you do not agree with a decision, ask to appeal it.

Work cooperatively

Work with the service provider to identify all the issues, concerns, and related facts. Be clear about what is known and what information is missing. Explain or review everything that has been done or tried so far. Work together to identify what you and your grandchild need. Brainstorm for all possible solutions, resources, and strategies. Look at the benefits, problems, and costs for each of these solutions in the long and short term. Get more information or professional advice if you need it. Choose the best solution for your grandchild. Make an agreement about who will do what – and get it in writing. Always get legal advice before you agree to anything that will be legally binding.

Find help to solve conflicts

If there is a conflict or personality clash with the worker or other person at the agency, ask for help to sort that out. Start by finding an advocate or clear-headed friend or family member to analyze the problem with you. Gather any additional information that will help, then meet again with the person in question and take along your advocate. If you are still not successful, request an interview with the person's supervisor. If that does not work, you can ask to make a formal complaint. Most agencies and services have a formal complaint procedure (and some of these procedures are described in this guide). Always go through the agency's complaints process first. If this system or person is going to be in your or your grandchild's life in the future, your goal should be to try to find a way to solve the problem respectfully and positively together.

If you find that you are still unsuccessful after your attempts to address your concerns using the agency's own complaint procedure, you might be able to appeal to an authority that oversees the agency in question, such as the Ombudsman, the Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal, or the Public Guardian and Trustee, depending on the problem. This guide has more information about your various appeal options in the sections that deal with the specific benefit. You can also consult [Dial-A-Law](#), a series of audio scripts on different legal topics, including how to complain. You can read or listen to them at <http://www.cbabc.org/>, or call 1-800-565-5297 (toll-free). <http://www.cbabc.org/For-the-Public/Dial-A-Law/Scripts>

Consider bringing a trusted friend

Sometimes it can be hard to advocate for yourself when your emotions about a situation are very strong. It can be hard to hear information clearly when we are very upset about a situation. Before you show up to a meeting or hearing on your own it is important to consider whether it might be worthwhile to bring along a friend to help you tell your story, explain your concerns, or take notes on what is said. This does not reflect a personal weakness – even the best self-advocate needs help sometimes.

Make some actions last resorts

You may feel tempted to go to the media to share your conflict or story. However, trying to publicize your problem in the media should always be the last resort when all other attempts for a fair resolution have failed. Involving the media could only serve to escalate the situation, and actually end up working against you. It could also have an adverse effect on the children, especially if they are old enough to see news reports or read newspapers.

Other last resort strategies may include writing to your MLA or MP, starting a petition, and forming or joining a protest or advocacy group to change an unfair law or policy. Another approach that you should look at as a last resort would be to sue the ministry, which is hard to do because of special protections it has under the law.

Other sources of free legal help

In addition to legal aid, there are other programs in the province that can help you with free legal advice, information, and referrals.

Access Pro Bono

Access Pro Bono is a non-profit society of lawyers who offer pro bono (free) legal services to people who cannot get legal aid but also cannot afford a lawyer (half of the people of BC fit into this category). Access Pro Bono clinics are located across the province and work out of community agencies.

Lower Mainland: **604-482-3195** Toll Free: **1-877-762-6664**

Email: help@accessprobono.ca

Website: <http://accessprobono.ca/>

The BC Courthouse Library Society

The BC Courthouse Library Society is a non-profit organization providing access to legal information resources and services to British Columbians. A lot of this information is available on their website.

Lower Mainland: **604-660-2841** Toll Free: **1-800-665-2570**

Website: <http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/>

Email: librarian@courthouselibrary.ca

Clicklaw

Clicklaw is a website that provides legal information, education and help for British Columbians.

Website: <http://www.clicklaw.bc.ca/>

This Legal Guide will be updated regularly. We are counting on readers to alert us to any errors, omissions or unclear content. Please send your feedback to “Communications” via: office@parentsupportbc.ca.