SUPREME COURT
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

CHAMBERS CONSULTATION – SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

This report summarizes the feedback the Court received in response to its chambers consultation.

Background

Chambers is an essential part of the civil and family justice system. Parties go to chambers for temporary remedies, procedural orders to advance their case, and final orders that determine some or all of the issues in dispute.

There are ongoing challenges with timely access to chambers, including difficulty obtaining hearing dates and delay of matters scheduled for hearing. The primary barrier to timely access is a mismatch between the volume of applications and the availability of judges and associate judges to hear them. Other operational constraints, including out-dated filing and document management systems and insufficient registry staffing, contribute to problems with chambers.

The Court seeks to improve access to chambers to the extent possible given resource constraints. To that end, the Court struck the Civil and Family Chambers Practice Working Group, with a mandate to review practices and procedures and recommend reforms to reduce delay and increase efficiency.

Consultation Overview

In July 2025, the Court invited the bar, litigants, organizations, and the public to comment on issues arising in chambers practice, as well as on specific areas of interest, and to provide suggestions for improvement.

The Court's consultation notice, attached as Appendix A, was published on the website and sent to various stakeholders. We received over 100 submissions in response, from lawyers, paralegals, legal assistants, and self-represented litigants, as well as consolidated feedback from law firms and organizations representing legal professionals.

Summary of Feedback

The feedback confirms that bookings, timely hearings, and use of chambers time are all areas that would benefit from reform.

Booking long chambers

The responses described barriers to obtaining hearing dates for applications of more than two hours. They reflected dissatisfaction with the current call-in system, such as an inability to get through to Supreme Court Scheduling and insufficient available dates. Some suggested that the call-in system favours the greater personnel and resources of larger firms.

As described in the consultation notice, the Court plans to implement an online booking system for long chambers. Funding for this initiative has been secured and the Court expects the system to be operational by early 2026. The booking system will track unsuccessful booking requests and give priority to the user's next request. The responses generally indicated that hearing dates should be based on urgency and priority. Some respondents supported the adoption of interim measures until online booking can be implemented, such as establishing a priority system.

Considerable support was expressed for offering half-day bookings and increasing the availability of judges to hear long chambers, and some support for judicial management of complex long chambers applications. Scheduling Vancouver on the assize was not supported.

Booking regular chambers

For applications of two hours or less, the responses expressed frustration with overbooked chambers lists for more matters than can be heard in a day. Many noted inefficiencies and costs of waiting for a matter to be called.

There was widespread support for publishing the chambers list in advance so parties can better assess when to schedule their applications. Also widely supported was limiting the number of hours or matters that can be booked on a given day.

Other proposed changes included: allowing counsel to appear at designated times; establishing blocks of time for certain types of matters; prioritizing applications previously bumped; and expanding court hours.

We received mixed feedback about limiting regular chambers to matters of one hour or less. Support was contingent on more judges being available for long chambers. The feedback on time slots for regular chambers was also mixed: some see this as more predictable, provided time estimates are enforced; others fear less flexibility and wasted chambers time if matters do not proceed.

Efficiency of regular chambers

Many submissions focussed on efficiency in regular chambers.

Proposals included:

- Triaging applications before they proceed, including screening for urgency, compliance with the rules, and readiness;
- Establishing a separate online chambers for uncontested and short matters;
- Increasing the speed and breadth of desk orders;
- Determining more applications on written submissions, subject to the discretion of the presider to require a hearing in chambers;
- Empowering the Registrar to decide matters like applications for short leave, fee waivers, adjournments, and reinstatement of applications to the hearing list; and
- Opening chambers earlier, imposing an earlier deadline for check-in, or developing a means for counsel to check-in online.

There was broad support for province-wide virtual chambers for uncontested applications and consent orders. Many supported a more expansive approach to virtual hearings, although views differed about scope. There was support for expansion of the Associate Judges Chambers Pilot Project.

Some supported establishing specialized chambers. For example, dedicated chambers for civil, family or foreclosure matters, for uncontested matters and consent orders, and for matters where a litigant is self-represented. There was support for prioritizing urgent family applications.

Some noted the need for increased assistance and support for self-represented litigants, both before court and in chambers.

The feedback about limiting application record size and the number of case authorities was mixed. Concerns were expressed about a “one-size-fits-all” approach because applications vary in length and complexity. There was more support for this measure in respect of shorter, straightforward chambers applications (e.g., 30 minutes or less).

There was broad support for reforming costs awards, to a simple, consistent and robust approach which discourages poor practice and unnecessary applications. Proposals included: consistent awards payable forthwith; more lump sum costs awards; and increasing the civil tariff.

<u>Stricter enforcement of existing rules</u>

There was substantial support for stricter enforcement of the rules, consistent with the right to be heard and the resolution of disputes on their merits.

Some supported enforcing page limits for notices of application and application responses, while increasing the limit for long chambers. There was substantial support for eliminating serial affidavits and requiring proper legal bases in notices of application and application responses.

There was strong support for stricter enforcement of time estimates. It was widely noted that inaccurate time estimates interfere with the proper functioning of chambers and delay the hearing of other matters. Suggestions included the presider canvassing time estimates with parties at the outset of a hearing, terminating the hearing if the time estimate is exceeded, timers in courtrooms, and costs consequences. Some responses were concerned, however, that strict enforcement can be impractical and not in the interests of justice.

Next Steps

Having reviewed the consultation feedback, the Court's Working Group is evaluating the potential changes to its chambers practice, some of which appear achievable in the near-term and some of which will need more time to implement, for example those that require rule amendments.

The Court wishes to extend its sincere appreciation to all those who participated in the consultation.

APPENDIX A

SUPREME COURT
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FEEDBACK INVITED: CIVIL AND FAMILY CHAMBERS PRACTICE REVIEW

The Court is alive to the ongoing challenges in managing chambers practice and in particular, difficulties in obtaining hearing dates and having matters heard in a timely way once scheduled. In response, the Court has struck a Civil and Family Chambers Practice Working Group to review the current practices and procedures for both regular (short) and long chambers, and to consider potential changes with a view to providing a more timely and efficient chambers process.

The Court invites interested members of the bar, litigants, organizations, and the public to comment on the issues they see arising in chambers practice and provide suggestions for improvement. Without limiting the scope of the feedback sought, areas of particular interest include:

- Limiting regular (short) chambers to matters with time estimates of one hour or less;
- Establishing set time slots (e.g. 15, 30, 45 and 60 minutes) rather than having parties provide estimates;
- For regular (short) chambers – limiting the size of application records, limiting the number of authorities the parties may rely on and implementing province-wide virtual hearings for uncontested applications and consent orders;
- For long chambers – offering half-day bookings, increasing the availability of judges for long chambers matters, scheduling on an assize in Vancouver, earlier filing of application records, and judicial application management in advance of hearing for lengthy/complex matters;
- For all chambers matters, stricter enforcement of existing rules, e.g. page limits for notices of application and application responses, requiring properly formed legal bases, eliminating serial affidavits and strict enforcement of time estimates.

The Court is aware of the significant interest in implementing an online booking system for long chambers matters, similar to what has been in place since November 2024 for trials. The Court supports moving to an online system and is awaiting the necessary funding to upgrade the current booking system.

Comments can be provided by email to Chambersfeedback@bccourts.ca until September 5, 2025.

Chief Justice Ron A. Skolrood
Supreme Court of British Columbia