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WORKING GROUP RELEASES REPORT ON FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM

VANCOUVER – A report of the Family Justice Reform Working Group, aimed at improving the family justice system and the way family law is delivered in B.C., was released today by the Justice Review Task Force.

A New Justice System for Families and Children report recommends changes to the family justice system to make it more accessible, effective and oriented to the needs of children and families. The Family Justice Reform Working Group, part of the Justice Review Task Force, was formed in July 2003 and spent 18 months looking at issues of family law in B.C.

Members of the working group include representatives from the B.C. Supreme Court and B.C. Provincial Court judiciaries, family law lawyers from across B.C., and representatives of the Ministry of Attorney General and the mediation community.

The working group recommends:

- Continuing to move away from adversarial approaches, and moving more deliberately towards cooperative approaches to the resolution of family law disputes;
- Creation of Family Justice Information Hubs offering information, an assessment of needs, and referrals to other services;
- A dispute resolution session before taking a first contested step in a court process;
- Having lawyers help clients choose the most appropriate dispute resolution model and provide legal advice and services at all stages of a dispute;
- A unified family court to work with all areas of family law, with judges specialized in family law and court procedures;
- Simplified procedures for family law including new court rules, less formal hearings, and use of online forms;
- Subsidizing settlement systems rather than litigation.

The Working Group conducted an extensive literature review, including reports previously published in B.C. and Canada, international reports and academic papers. Many of the recommendations made in the report build on innovative programs introduced over the last 10 years in the family justice system.

Consultation will begin June 9, 2005. The Task Force welcomes comments on any of the report's recommendations. Complete copies of the Report can be found at the B.C. Justice Review Internet site www.bcjusticereview.org

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