

# CHAPTER SIX: HUMAN RIGHTS

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# CHAPTER SIX: HUMAN RIGHTS

## I. GOVERNING LEGISLATION AND RESOURCES

### Legislation

*Human Rights Code*, RSBC 1996, c 210, as amended [HRC]

*Canadian Human Rights Act*, RSC 1985, c H-6, as amended [CHRA]

*Civil Rights Protection Act*, RSBC 1996, c 49 [CRPA].

### Resources

#### **B.C. Human Rights Tribunal**

1170 - 605 Robson Street  
Vancouver, B.C., V6B 5J3  
E-mail: [BCHumanRightsTribunal@gov.bc.ca](mailto:BCHumanRightsTribunal@gov.bc.ca)  
Website: [www.bchrt.bc.ca](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca)

Telephone: (604) 775-2000  
TTY: (604) 775-2021  
Toll-free in B.C.: 1-888-440-8844  
Fax: (604) 775-2020

- An independent, quasi-judicial body created by the B.C. Human Rights Code, responsible for accepting, screening, mediating and adjudicating provincial human rights complaints. Its website is very helpful. Their Guides and Information Sheets provide thorough procedural information in English, Chinese, and Punjabi. Tribunal's decisions dating back to 1997 are available online.

#### **The B.C. Human Rights Clinic**

300 – 1140 West Pender Street  
Vancouver, B.C., V6E 4G1  
Website: [www.bchrc.net](http://www.bchrc.net)

Telephone: (604) 622-1100  
Toll-free in Canada: 1-855-685-6222  
Fax: (604) 685-7611

- The BC Human Rights Clinic is operated by the Community Legal Assistance Society and funded by the BC Ministry of Justice. The Clinic provides free legal representation to low-income complainants or those unable to represent themselves due to lack of capacity or disability before the BC Human Rights Tribunal who qualify for services. It also provides a free short service Drop-In Clinic at the Tribunal on Mondays.

#### **The B.C. Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA)**

550 - 1188 West Georgia Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 4A2  
Website: [www.bccla.org](http://www.bccla.org)

Telephone: (604) 630-9748  
Fax: (604) 687-3045  
E-mail: [info@bccla.org](mailto:info@bccla.org)

- If the client's legal issue also extends to Charter rights, the BCCLA may provide assistance.

#### **The Canadian Human Rights Commission**

Website: [www.chrc-ccdp.ca](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca)

##### **Western Region**

Canada Place, Suite 1645, 9700 Jasper Avenue  
P.O. Box 21, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4C3  
TTY: 1-888-643-3304

Telephone: (780) 495-4040  
Toll-Free: 1-888-214-1090  
Fax: (780) 495-4044

##### **National Office**

344 Slater Street, 8th Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1

Telephone: (613) 995-1151  
Toll-free: 1-888-214-1090

- The Commission can independently initiate federal human rights complaints but normally assists in their drafting and investigates complaints lodged by individuals or organizations. If insufficient evidence of discrimination is presented, the Commission can dismiss the complaint. If the Commission finds that the allegations of discrimination warrant mediation or adjudication, it can refer cases to conciliation or to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal for hearing.

## II. LSLAP'S ROLE IN HUMAN RIGHTS PROCEEDINGS

### A. *Federal and Provincial Legislation*

The first step when faced with a human rights issue is to determine whether the provincial legislation, the *BC Human Rights Code* (HRC), applies or whether the problem falls within federal jurisdiction under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (CHRA). Section 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* ((UK), 30 & 31 Victoria, c 3 reprinted in RSC 1985, App II, No 5) lists out the bodies that fall under federal jurisdiction which include chartered banks, entities engaged in inter-provincial transportation, media broadcasting, or mining and First Nations issues. Section 92 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* ((UK), 30 & 31 Victoria, c 3 reprinted in RSC 1985, App II, No 5) on the other hand, lists out the bodies that fall under provincial jurisdiction which includes property and civil rights in the province as well as generally all matters of a merely local or private nature in the province. In either case, because human rights legislation is considered to be “quasi-constitutional” in nature, the legislation must be given a liberal and purposive interpretation to advance the broad policy implications underlying it. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) has a useful assessment tool that can assist in determining if an entity falls under federal jurisdiction. It can be found at [http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/complaint\\_assessment\\_tool](http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/complaint_assessment_tool). This tool is not always accurate so if an entity is not found there but you have reason to believe that the entity is federal follow up with further inquiries and analysis.

In the case that a complaint is covered by the HRC, the matter will be before the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal (BC HRT). Conversely, if the complaint is covered by federal legislation, the matter would be handled by the CHRC. Human rights matters taking place in BC will tend to fall under the provincial legislation. However, if the complaint against the respondent is based on an action they undertook in their capacity as an agent or employee of a body that falls under federal jurisdiction, then that complaint would actually be governed by federal legislation. Examples of some industries that are federally regulated and therefore fall within the federal human rights jurisdiction are:

- Banking – but not credit unions.
- Telecommunications (internet, television and radio) – but not call centres.
- Transportation that crosses provincial or international boundaries (airlines, trains, moving companies, couriers).

### B. *LSLAP's Role in Provincial and Federal Proceedings*

In provincial proceedings clinicians may assist clients in completing the Complaint or Response Forms at the initial stages. Beyond this, LSLAP's role is usually limited to less complex cases where the scheduled hearing is set for two days or fewer. Where LSLAP cannot help directly, we can refer complainants to the B.C. Human Rights Clinic who may be able to assist low-income, or disabled persons who cannot represent themselves in all aspects of their human rights matter if they qualify for services.

The BC Human Rights Clinic will take applications for assistance made within thirty days after a complaint has been accepted for filing. However, there may be more limited assistance available for those who are applying beyond the thirty days.

In the federal system the Canadian Human Rights Commission [CHRC] has been set up to assist individuals to draft complaints and facilitate mediation. Students should therefore refer clients to the CHRC for assistance, though they can remain involved in the process by providing representation at mediation. To read more about the federal Human Rights system see **Section II.D: The Canadian Human Rights Act**, below.

### III. THE B.C. HUMAN RIGHTS CODE

The B.C. Human Rights Code [“HRC”] is the legislation currently applicable in BC and is administered by the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal.

The HRC applies to matters within the provincial constitutional heads of power, and covers both public and private bodies and individuals. For example, the HRC applies to provincially regulated employers, unions, professional associations, most commercial businesses, Crown corporations, landlord-tenant relations, as well as the provincial government itself.

**NOTE:** The Tribunal’s decisions are available online at [www.bchrt.bc.ca/decisions](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/decisions). They are indexed by year dating back to 1997 and searchable based on a variety of criteria.

The Chart below illustrates how the HRC’s protected grounds apply to each area of protection.

Protected Grounds	Protected Areas						
	Publications	Public Services & Accommodation	Purchase of Property	Tenancy	Employment Advertisements	Employment	Unions & Associations
Race	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colour	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ancestry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Place of Origin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political Belief	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓
Religion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marital Status	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family Status	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical or Mental Disability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sex	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Sexual Orientation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
Criminal or Summary Conviction	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓
Source of Income	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x

**A. *Protections, Exceptions and Exemptions***

The HRC provides protection against discrimination in several different contexts, which are listed in ss. 7 – 14. However, for many of these protected areas, the HRC provides certain exceptions for which *prima facie* discrimination is not prohibited.

Additionally, s 41, commonly referred to as the group rights exemption, allows what might otherwise be deemed as prohibited discriminatory acts by charitable, philanthropic, educational and other not-for-profit organizations, if it is done while promoting the interests and welfare of a group of people that share a common identifiable characteristic, such as religion, race, or marital status. Please refer to *Vancouver Rape Relief Society v Nixon*, 2005 BCCA 601.

Furthermore, under s 42, it is not discrimination to plan, advertise, adopt or implement an employment equity program that has the objective of ameliorating the conditions of individuals or groups who are disadvantaged because of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, physical or mental disability or sex. Such programs may obtain prior approval by the BC Human Rights Tribunal and, if pre-approved, will not be deemed to be in contravention of the HRC.

Finally, s. 43, often referred to as the “retaliation” section, prohibits discrimination against a person because that person complains, has been named, gives evidence, or otherwise assists in a complaint or other proceeding under the HRC. This section will very soon be amended to include protection of a person who is planning to commence, but has not yet filed, a human rights complaint.

**1. *Discriminatory Publication***

Section 7 deals with forms of discrimination against individuals or groups of individuals, which are published, displayed, or made public. This section prohibits hate literature and other such communications that is or is likely expose someone in a protected group to hatred or contempt. Please refer to *Elmasry and Habib v Roger’s Publishing and MacQueen (No 4)*, 2008 BCHRT 378 at para 21-27.

**Exception:** Section 7 does **not** apply to communications that are intended to be private and are related to activities otherwise permitted under the HRC.

**2. *Discrimination in Facilities “Customarily Available to the Public”***

Section 8 states that any accommodation, service, or facility customarily available to the public may not be denied to an individual for reasons based on that person’s race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, gender, or sexual orientation.

*British Columbia Council of Human Rights v Berg*, [1993] 2 SCR 353 at para 10 provides the definition of “customarily available to the public”. A service is customarily available to the public if the nature of the relationship is public. Look at the relationship between the facility and the victim and the nature of the service itself. The court found that a university is its own public and that the relationships between students and professors, who present the public “face” of the university, are public in this context. Please refer to *HMTQ v McGrath*, 2009 BCSC 180 at para 89-93 for a more recent case that cites the definition of what is “customarily available to the public” following *Berg*.

While there is no enumerated list of relationships that count as public, locales such as pubs, night clubs, hotels, theatres, transportation services, education facilities, insurance, medical treatment in hospitals, management services in condominiums, and participation in sporting events have all been found to entail public relationships. Licensing services and facilities may also involve public relationships; for example, discrimination prohibited by s. 8 was ultimately found when the BC Motor Vehicle Branch maintained a blanket refusal to issue drivers licenses to those with certain visual impairments regardless of actual driving ability. Please refer to *BC (Superintendent of Motor Vehicles) v BC (Council of Human Rights)*, [1999] 3 SCR 868 (“Grismer”).

**Exceptions:** There are a number of circumstances where discrimination is permitted, if it can be shown to be supported by “bona fide and reasonable justification” (BFRJ) (as per the wording of s 8(1)). For the most authoritative perspective, see the “Grismer” case (cited above), which applied the three-part “Meiorin” test to services: *British Columbia (Public Service Employee Relations Commission) v British Columbia Government Service Employees' Union* [1999] 3 S.C.R. 3, a Supreme Court of Canada case that created a unified test to determine if a violation of human rights legislation can be justified as a *bona fide* occupational requirement (BFOR).

Additionally, courts have found that services provided to members of a group who come together as a result of a private selection process based on attributes personal to the members do not qualify as services “customarily available to the public” and are therefore not subject to s 8 of the HRC. Please refer to *Marine Drive Golf Club v Buntain et al and BC Human Rights Tribunal*, 2007 BCCA 17 at para 48-56.

Section 8(2) also contains certain built-in exceptions. Discrimination based on sex is permitted insofar as it relates to the maintenance of public decency. Discrimination based on sex, physical or mental disability, or age is permitted insofar as it relates to the determination of premiums or benefits under life or health insurance policies.

### **3. *Discrimination in Purchase and Rental of Property***

Section 9 provides that a person must not be denied the opportunity to purchase real property due their race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or sex.

Section 10 states that a person shall not be denied the right to occupy any space that is represented as being available for occupancy or be discriminated against with respect to a term or condition of the tenancy on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, age or lawful source of income. Please refer to *Hunter v LaViolette (No 2)*, 2007 BCHRT 415.

**Exceptions:** This section does not apply if the tenant is to share the use of any sleeping, bathroom, or cooking facilities with the person making the representation (e.g. as a roommate). Also, it continues to be possible for landlords to discriminate against those under the age of 19 or based on political belief when accepting new tenants or making other decisions related to rental properties.

#### 4. *Discrimination in Employment Advertisements and Interviews*

Section 11 prohibits employment advertisements that express limitations or preferences based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, sex or age. Refer to *Anderson v Thompson Creek Mining Ltd Endako Mines*, 2007 BCHRT 99.

**Exception:** Discrimination in employment advertisements may be permitted if such limitations are based on “*bona fide* occupational requirement(s)” as per the wording of s 11.

For case law on discrimination during the interview process, please refer to *Khalil v Woori Education Group*, 2012 BCHRT 186 at para 29-45. An employer, under s 13, cannot refuse to employ someone on the ground mental or physical disability unless there is a *bona fide* occupational requirement (see subsection 6: Discrimination in Employment and the Duty to Accommodate).

#### 5. *Discrimination in Wages*

Section 12 states that wage parity between sexes is required for similar or substantially similar jobs. Please refer to *Jules v United Native Nations Society and Johnson*, 2009 BCHRT 115. Recovery of wages is limited to wages of an employee during the twelve-month period immediately before the earlier of the date of the employee's termination or the commencement of the action. Most of the remedies under this section are also available under s.13 which does not have a limitation on the period of time during which wages can be claimed.

**Limitation Dates:** Section 12 of the HRC states:

(a) the action must be commenced no later than 12 months from the termination of the employee's services, and

(b) the action applies only to wages of an employee during the 12 month period immediately before the earlier of the date of the employee's termination or the commencement of the action.

This seems to imply a twelve-month limitation period. It is important to note, however, that s. 22 of the HRC sets a six-month limitation period for all human rights complaints. This section does not include an exception for complaints made under s. 12, therefore, any complaint made under s. 12 should be filed within six months of the incident of discrimination to ensure that the limitation date is not missed. See *Anderson v. Commonwealth Construction and others*, 2012 BCHRT 34 for an example of a s. 12 complaint which was dismissed for being filed more than six months after the complainant's termination date. It is not clear but it appears that the wording in s. 12 which sets a limitation date of twelve months therefore applies only to separate actions taken under that section, and not to human rights complaints.

**Exception:** A difference in the rate of pay between employees of different sexes based on a factor **other** than sex is allowed, provided that the factor on which the difference is based would reasonably justify the difference.

#### 6. *Discrimination in Employment and the Duty to Accommodate*

Section 13 provides that no person shall refuse to employ another person or discriminate against a person with respect to employment or any term or condition of employment on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, or age of that person or

because that person has a criminal record that is unrelated to the employment. Please refer to *Ratzlaff v Marpaul Construction Limited and Rondeau*, 2010 BCHRT 13.

In addition, the Government of B.C. has prohibited mandatory retirement as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 by revising the HRC to extend protection from age discrimination to those 65 and over (Bill 31, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess, 38<sup>th</sup> Parl, 2007). Under these new amendments, individuals in both the public and private sector are now able to choose the age at which they wish to retire and the protection from age discrimination applies to anyone who is 19 years or older (s 1, “age”).

With respect to physical disability, the B.C. Court of Appeal has recently ruled that an employer is not guilty of discrimination if he or she dismisses an employee for misconduct (e.g. theft in the workplace) that would independently justify dismissal, even if that employee’s drug or alcohol dependency was a contributing factor to the misconduct; see *British Columbia (Public Service Agency) v British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union*, 2008 BCCA 357 at para 11-18. The critical question is whether the employer’s decision was influenced by the employee’s protected characteristic, or whether instead, the employer would have reached the same decision respecting any other employee guilty of the same misconduct.

**Bona Fide Occupational Requirement:** In the case of discrimination on the basis of disability, Section 13(4) permits discrimination in employment if the basis for discrimination concerns a “*bona fide* occupational requirement” (BFOR). In *British Columbia (Public Service Employee Relations Commission) v British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union*, (1999) 35 CHRR d/257 at para 54 (“Meiorin”), the Supreme Court of Canada established a three-part test for BFOR. An initial investigation determines whether the standard, policy or practice has the direct or indirect effect of excluding or negatively affecting individuals protected by the HRC. The onus of establishing sufficient evidence of a *prima facie* case lies with the complainant.

In order to establish a *prima facie* case the complainant must introduce evidence which, on its face, satisfies the following three elements:

1. The complainant must establish that they are a member of a protected group.
2. They must establish that they suffered adverse treatment.
3. They must establish a nexus or connection between their protected status and the adverse treatment.

It is important to note that a complainant need not establish that their membership in a protected group was the sole or primary reason for their adverse treatment. It is sufficient to establish that it was a reason for their adverse treatment.

Once this evidence is established, the onus of proving a BFOR defence is transferred to the respondent. The respondent must justify the standard by satisfying three elements:

1. The fundamental purpose of the standard must be rationally connected to the performance of the job.
2. The standard must have been adopted in good faith and with the legitimate belief that it is necessary in order to satisfactorily and safely perform all job related tasks.
3. The standard is reasonably necessary to performing the job and it is impossible to accommodate the specific claims of the plaintiff without incurring undue hardship to the employer.

For a specific example of a BCHRT case that applies the BFOR test in a disability context, please refer to *Kerr v Boehringer Ingelheim (Canada)* (No 4), 2009 BCHRT 196.

What may be considered as “undue hardship” varies by employer depending on the circumstances. In *Central Okanagan School District No 23 v Renaud*, [1992] 2 SCR 970 at para

21-23, the Supreme Court of Canada noted that it is more than a minor inconvenience, but that actual interference must be established. Factors the court may consider financial cost; health and safety; and flexibility and size of the workplace. For a more exhaustive guide for employers and employees seeking accommodation, please see the B.C. Human Rights Clinic's "FAQ – Duty to Accommodate" at: [http://www.bchrc.net/duty\\_to\\_accommodate](http://www.bchrc.net/duty_to_accommodate).

The "*bona fide* occupational requirement" exception was unaffected by the 2008 amendments, and continues to apply to age discrimination as it relates to mandatory retirement. Thus, if the employer can establish one or more BFORs related to age, then mandatory retirement can still be imposed on those grounds at any age.

Also, distinctions based on age are not prohibited insofar as they relate to a *bona fide* seniority scheme. Distinctions based on marital status, physical or mental disability, sex or age will continue to be allowed under *bona fide* retirement, superannuation, or pension plans, and under *bona fide* insurance plans, including those which are self-funded by employers or provided by third parties: see s 13(3). Mandatory retirement may also not constitute a breach of the Code when it is part of a *bona fide* pension plan as long as it is not done in order to circumvent the rights of individuals.

## **7. *Discrimination by Unions, Employer Organizations or Occupational Associations***

Section 14 states that trade unions, employers' organizations or occupational associations may not deny membership to any person or discriminate against a person on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, or unrelated criminal record. Please refer to *De Lima v. The Empire Landmark and Hotel Conference Centre and Major*, 2006 BCHRT 440.

Protection against denial of membership has been held to apply only against an implicated union, organization, or association and not against an individual, since "persons" are not covered by s 14. Please refer to *Ratsoy v BC Teachers' Federation and others*, 2005 BCHRT 53 at para 23. This differs from other protections granted by the HRC, which, in appropriate circumstances, generally do allow an action to be brought against both an organization (e.g. an employer) and its individual members (e.g. a manager).

### **B. *Prohibited Grounds of Discrimination***

#### **1. *General***

Prohibited grounds of discrimination include gender, age (for those 19 and over), race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, criminal record (that is not relevant to the employment, union or occupational association), and lawful source of income. Note that not all of the areas listed in ss 7 -14 of the HRC are afforded protection against all forms of discrimination. For example, the HRC does not prohibit landlords from discriminating on the basis of a tenant's political beliefs. The grounds of discrimination that apply depend on the section of the HRC in question. One must first decide which section is involved and then check to see which grounds are associated with that section (see the helpful chart on page 6-3 above) .

To determine whether a violation of the HRC has occurred, consult the relevant section of the HRC and review recent case law. Case law can be found on the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal website ([www.bchrt.bc.ca/decisions](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/decisions)), indexed by year, and searchable based on a variety of criteria.

It should be noted that one might file a complaint on a combination of grounds and that discrimination does not need to have been the sole or primary motivating factor to establish a case on a particular ground, as long as discrimination was a contributing factor to the impugned action.

Discrimination need not be intentional. Any policy or action that has an adverse effect on a protected group might be considered discriminatory. Please refer to *Ont Human Rights Comm and O'Malley v Simpsons-Sears*, [1985] 2 SCR 536 at para 14. The policy or act does not have to affect every person in the group for it to be considered discriminatory. E.g., if a policy discriminates against only women that are pregnant it would still be considered sex discrimination. As well, it is possible that an act or policy may affect men as well as women, but affect one sex to a disproportionate degree, in which case it could also qualify as sex discrimination.

Discrimination can also be established on an “intersectional” basis. This means that the discriminatory action had an adverse impact on the basis of multiple protected grounds, occurring simultaneously, which cannot easily be separated from one another. It is not always necessary to establish that each individual ground has been met where intersectional discrimination can be established. Please refer to *Radek v Henderson Development (Canada) Ltd.*, 2005 BCHRT 302 para 463 for more information.

If, after reading the HRC, you are still unsure whether the impugned action lies within the ambit of the HRC, contact the B.C. Human Rights Clinic (see **Section I.B: Resources**, above).

## **2. Ancestry, Colour, Place of Origin and Race**

The grounds of ancestry, colour, place of origin and race are included in the HRC as a means to combat racism and racial discrimination. Each of the above referenced grounds is protected in the HRC and may be cited individually in connection with a discriminatory incident or grouped together in order to better illustrate a particular situation. For further information on how the above grounds interact, please refer to *Torres and others v. Langtry Industries (No 5)*, 2009 BCHRT 3.

Discrimination on the basis of ancestry, colour, place of origin or race can also be established where the respondent caused harm to the complainant by taking advantage of a vulnerability caused by the complainant's ancestry, colour, place of origin or race. For more information, see *PN v. FR and another (No. 2)*, 2015 BCHRT 60 (*CanLII*). Please note that this decision is under Judicial Review as of June, 2015.

In B.C., the grounds of ancestry, colour, place of origin and race are protected in the areas of employment; employment advertising; membership in a trade union, employer's organization or occupational association; public services such as schools, government programs, restaurants, and stores; publications; tenancy; and purchase of property.

## **3. Political Belief**

The HRC provides protection from discrimination due to political beliefs and/or affiliations in the areas of employment; employment advertising; and membership in a trade union, employer's organization or occupational association.

In BC, few human rights cases have been decided on the grounds of political belief and, as such, a comprehensive definition of what constitutes a political belief under the HRC has not been established.

The Tribunal has, however, identified two key principles in determining whether a complainant's belief should be protected under the HRC:

1. Political belief is to be given a liberal definition; it is not confined to partisan political beliefs. Hence political beliefs are not limited to beliefs about recognized or registered political parties.
2. Political belief is not unlimited; for example, views about matters such as business or human resources decisions an employer may make do not come within its ambit.

Please refer to *Prokopetz and Talkkari v Burnaby Firefighters' Union and City of Burnaby*, 2006 BCHRT 462 at para 31.

In the *Wali v Jace Holdings*, 2012 BCHRT 389 at para 117, the tribunal determined that free speech regarding matters affecting the regulation of a profession could constitute a political belief. This was narrowed to the particular legislative framework and mandate of the College of Pharmacists. The tribunal member took into account that the issue was a legislative initiative, involving public welfare and was being debated in the pharmaceutical community in determining that the belief was a protected political belief.

#### **4. Religion**

Religious discrimination cases have helped to define several of the fundamental ideas and standards that comprise human rights law in Canada. Matters before the court have routinely addressed discriminatory incidents concerning religious faith, beliefs, customs and practices. In B.C., protection from discrimination based on religion is provided in the areas of employment; employment advertising; membership in a trade union, employer's organization, or occupational association; public services; publications; tenancy and purchase of property. The duty to accommodate has been firmly established in case law and obliges employers to accommodate the religious practices of their employees as long as doing so does not cause undue hardship. These practices may be linked to customs involving prayer, dietary restrictions, clothing requirements, and time off on religious holy days. Please refer to *Moore v British Columbia (Ministry of Social Services)*, BCHRC (1992), 17 CHRR D/426.

#### **5. Family Status and Marital Status**

Family status generally refers to parent-child relationships but may encompass other family relationships including those between siblings, in-laws, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and cousins. For case law on the definition of family status and the test for discrimination on that basis see *Fianza v. Ladco Investments Inc* (1999), 35 CHRR D/500 (BCHRT) at para 13-18, in which a sibling relationship is brought under the ambit of protection against family status discrimination. The leading authority on discrimination in employment on the ground of family status in BC is the British Columbia Court of Appeal decision in *HSABC v. Campbell River & North Island Transition Society*, 127 L.A.C. (4th) 1 (B.C.C.A.) ("*Campbell River*").

Marital status normally refers to couples with a 'spouse-like' relationship. The HRC extends protection to all individuals regardless of their status (i.e. married, common-law, single, separated, divorced or widowed). Issues involving family and marital status may often overlap and may be cited concurrently to fully illustrate a certain situation.

In BC, the grounds of family and marital status are protected in the areas of employment; employment advertising; membership in a trade union, employer's organization, or occupational association; public services; tenancy and publications. Only marital status is protected in the area of purchase of property.

#### **6. Physical or Mental Disability**

Disability is not defined in the HRC. However, the concept of physical disability, for human rights purposes, generally indicates a: "physiological state that is involuntary, has some

degree of permanence, and impairs the person's ability, in some measure, to carry out the normal functions of life. Please refer to *Boyce v New Westminster (City)* (1994), 24 CHRR D/441 at para 50. See *Rogal v Dalglish*, 2000 BCHRT 22 at para 19 for a more recent case that refers to *Boyce v New Westminster (City)*'s definition of physical disability. In *Morris v BC Rail*, 2003 BCHRT 14, at para 214, the Tribunal set out the following three aspects for assessing whether an individual has a physical or mental disability:

- the individual's physical or mental impairment, if any;
- the functional limitations, if any, which result from that impairment; and
- the social, legislative or other response to that impairment and/or limitations, assessed in light of the concepts of human dignity, respect and the right to equality.

Furthermore, according to *Morris v BC Rail* at para 207, proof of impairment and/or limitation, while relevant, will not be required in all cases. See *McGowan v Pretty Estates*, 2013 BCHRT 40 (CanLII) for more information.

The protection of the HRC extends to those who are perceived to have a disability or to be at risk of becoming disabled in the future. As such, the Tribunal has rejected the application of strict criteria to determine what constitutes a physical or mental disability. This has led to a somewhat expansive definition. For example, protection has been specifically applied to persons with AIDS, persons who are HIV positive, and persons believed to be HIV positive, all of whom are considered to have a physical disability. Please refer to *McDonald v. Schuster Real Estate*, 2005 BCHRT 177 at para 24 and *J v London Life Insurance Co* (1999), 36 CHRR D/43 (BCHRT) at para 42.

As noted above, protection from discrimination due to physical disability, extends to discrimination on the basis of a perceived propensity to become disabled in the future. In *J v London Life Insurance Co* at para 46, for example, the Tribunal found that the HRC prohibited discrimination against a person based on the fact that his spouse was HIV positive. Protection under this ground has also been extended to those who are suffering from addictions issues.

Where a behaviour or policy adversely affects a protected group or person, either directly or indirectly, there is a duty to accommodate, meaning that all efforts must be taken to accommodate the group or person to the point of undue hardship. Examples include installing wheelchair access and allowing workers days off on religious holidays. Please refer to *Ferguson v Kimpton*, 2006 BCHRT 62 at para 68.

An employer's duty to accommodate involves a substantive aspect as well as a procedural aspect. For instance, an employer who has exhausted all reasonable means of accommodation short of incurring undue hardship would have met their substantive duty to accommodate. What constitutes reasonable measures is a question of fact and will differ from case to case. However, the employer's conduct may still be found to have failed to comply with the procedural aspect of the duty to accommodate if they treat the complainant unfairly while fulfilling their substantive duty. Please refer to *British Columbia (Public Service Employees Relations Commission) v British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union (BCGSEU)*, [1999] 3 SCR 3 ("Meiorin"), at para 65-66.

## **7. Age (19 or over)**

Age can refer to an individual's legal age, membership in a specific age-category, or a generalized characterization of a specific age. In BC, age is a protected ground of discrimination in the areas of employment; employment advertising; membership in a trade union, employer's organization, or occupational association; public services; tenancy and publications. Please refer to *Miu v Vanart Aluminum and Tam*, 2006 BCHRT 219 at para 18.

In each of these areas, age protection is restricted to those 19 years of age and over. However, those under 19 years are still able to bring complaints to the BCHRT based on grounds other than age.

## **8. Criminal or Summary Conviction**

BC's HRC protects individuals convicted of a criminal or summary conviction offence, or a perceived conviction (i.e. arrest or stayed charges) as long as the offence is unrelated to the employment or the intended employment of the individual. Please refer to *Purewall v ICBC*, 2011 BCHRT 43 at para 21, *Clement v Jackson and Abdulla*, 2006 BCHRT 411 at para 14 and *Korthe v Hillstrom Oil Company Ltd* (1997), (BCHRT) at para 23-28. In an effort to establish whether or not a conviction may affect an employment decision, courts require an assessment of the relationship between the conviction and the job description. As such, employers must take into account the circumstances of the conviction in order to determine whether or not the charge relates to the employment. In *Woodward Stores (British Columbia) v McCartney (1983)* 43 BCLR 314 at para 7-9, Justice MacDonald laid out a list of criteria to be considered in making this determination. These criteria are as follows:

- Does the behaviour which formed the basis of the charge, if repeated, compromise the employers' ability to conduct business safely and effectively?
- What were the circumstances and details of the offence, e.g., what was the person's age at the time of the offence and were there any extenuating factors?
- How much time has passed since the charge? What has the individual done since that time and has there been any indication of recidivism? Has there been evidence of the individual's desire for rehabilitation?

In BC, the HRC extends protection on the basis of a criminal or summary conviction only in the area of employment.

## **9. Sexual Orientation**

The HRC prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, affording protection for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals. The issue of whether or not BDSM is covered under the Code has not been tested yet but the issue was raised in one complaint that was dismissed on other grounds. *Hayes v. Vancouver Police Department and Barker*, 2005 BCHRT 590

In BC, protection on the basis of sexual orientation is provided in the areas of employment; employment advertising; membership in a trade union, employer's organization, or occupational association; public services; publications; tenancy and purchase of property.

## **10. Sex (includes sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination and transgender discrimination)**

Discrimination on the basis of sex, which is prohibited under the HRC, includes sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects a work environment or leads to adverse job-related consequences for the victims of harassment". Please refer to *Janzen v Platy Enterprises Ltd*, [1989] 1 SCR 1252 at 1284.

In *PN v. FR and another (No. 2)*, 2015 BCHRT 60, the HRT increased the damages available for cases of sexual harassment by awarding \$50,000 for injury to dignity to a domestic foreign worker who was sexually harassed and assaulted. This case also involved allegations of discrimination based on family status, race, age, colour and place of origin.. Please note that as of June 2015, this decision is awaiting judicial review.

Sexual harassment can take a number of forms. One such form may occur when the employer or a supervisory employee requires another employee to submit to sexual advances as a condition of obtaining or keeping employment or employment-related benefits. It may also occur when employees are forced to work in an environment that is hostile, offensive,

or intimidating, such as where an employer allows pornography to be posted in the workplace.

It is not generally necessary for an employee to expressly object to their harasser before filing a complaint. There is also no requirement of continuing harassment; a single incident is sufficient if serious.

The test for whether sexual harassment occurred is an objective standard. It must be shown that the alleged discriminatory conduct is “reasonably perceived to create a negative psychological and emotional environment for work.” Please refer to *Mottu v MacLeod*, 2004 BCHRT 76 at para 41 where the Tribunal found that dress code requirements based on sex could constitute discrimination on the basis of sex. The test must also take into account the customary boundaries of social interaction in the circumstances. There may not be an action if the complaint arises due to the complainant’s innate sensitivity or defensiveness. Factors that are examined to determine the limits of reasonableness in a particular context include the nature of the conduct, the workplace environment, the type of prior personal interaction, and whether a prior objection or complaint was made. It is no defence to harassment, however, to show that harassing behaviour was traditionally tolerated in a workplace.

The Tribunal has also found that transgender discrimination is protected under the ground of sex . Please refer to *Nixon v Vancouver Rape Relief Society*, 2002 BCHRT 1 (Para 3) and *Dawson v. Vancouver Police Board (No. 2)*, 2015 BCHRT 54.

*Dawson* establishes that transgender discrimination includes misgendering of trans individuals (addressing a trans person using a pronoun, name or gender marker other than that which the trans person uses to identify themselves). It can also include the denial of trans-specific medical services.

### ***11. Source of Income***

In a 1994 amendment to the Residential Tenancy Act, source of income was established as a protected ground of discrimination with regards to rental housing. This amendment safeguards the tenancy rights of individuals on social assistance or disability pensions, who might otherwise be denied safe housing. Enforced by the BCHRT, source of income is a protected ground only in the area of tenancy. Please refer to *Tanner and Vlaka*, 2003 BCHRT 36 at para 22-26 for further discussion.

### ***12. Discrimination Based on Involvement in Human Rights Proceedings (s 43)***

Besides those listed above, there is another ground of discrimination provided for by s 43 of the HRC. Under the “protection” provision it is considered a ground of discrimination to discriminate against a person because that person has made a human rights complaint, is named in a complaint, gives evidence, or otherwise assists in a complaint or human rights proceeding. This section will very soon be amended to include protection of those intending to bring a human rights complaint but who have not yet filed one.

## ***C. The Complaint Process***

The BC Human Rights Tribunal handles complaints made under the HRC. The first step in filing a complaint with the Tribunal is to fill out a Complaint Form, which are available from the Tribunal at its office address, on its website or from other local Government Agent offices. There are helpful self-help guides to filling out complaint and response forms on the Tribunal’s website. The BC Human Rights Clinic can also assist in drafting the complaint and completing the Complaint Form. See **Section I.B: Resources**.

## 1. *Who Can Lodge a Complaint*

A complaint may be made by an individual victim of discrimination, one of the victims on behalf of the group or class, or by someone acting as a representative of named victim(s). If the Complaint Form is being filled out on behalf of another person or group or class of persons, the Representative Complaint Form must also be filled out and accompany the Complaint Form when sent to the Tribunal.

## 2. *How to File a Complaint*

The Complaint Form must be filed with the Tribunal via mail, fax or e-mail. Complainants may access the Complaint Form and other valuable resources at the BC Human Rights Tribunal website (see **Section I.B: Resources**). If filed by e-mail, one must also send in a signed and dated copy within 21 days. The party who is filing the complaint should be aware of the time limits. There is a general **six month** limitation period, which may be extended in certain circumstances. See **Section II.C.5.d: Limitation Period**.

## 3. *Review Process*

Once the Complaint Form is filed, the Tribunal will review the form to determine if it fits under the HRC and if it appears to meet the six-month limitation period. If the Tribunal believes that it may not have the power to deal with the complaint in substance or it is out of time, the complainant will be given a chance to respond before the Tribunal decides whether or not to proceed with the complaint. If the Tribunal believes it can proceed, it will send the Complaint Form to the respondent for a response to the complaint.

A complainant **must** set out a *prima facie* case of discrimination under the HRC on their initial complaint form. If a *prima facie* case is not set out then the complaint might not be accepted by the Tribunal. Even if accepted, it could still be vulnerable to an application to dismiss under s 27 of the HRC at a later stage.

In order to set out a *prima facie* case the complainant must allege facts that, on its face, satisfy the following three elements:

1. They are a member of a protected group;
2. They suffered adverse treatment;
3. There is a nexus or connection between their protected status and the adverse treatment.

For greater analysis of this topic please refer to *Stone v BC (Ministry of Health) (No. 7)*, 2007 BCHRT 55 at para 99-111.

## 4. *Settlement Meeting*

**Parties may agree to a settlement meeting at any time after the complaint has been filed.** Guides for settlement meetings and hearings are available from the Tribunal at its office address or on its web site. Additionally, the BC Human Rights Clinic may be able to assist a complainant at a settlement meeting or with settlement negotiations in general.

At a settlement meeting, the Tribunal can make recommendations and provide opinions as to the merits of the case, but cannot force parties to settle. Parties to the dispute may agree to voluntarily settle, in which case the complainant will file a Complaint Withdrawal Form as part of the terms of settlement.

## **5. Procedural Options for Employees**

The HRC is a particularly useful tool for seeking redress for a client who has been discriminated against in employment situations. Since the B.C. Human Rights Clinic may potentially be able to handle much of the legal work free of charge, a complaint under the HRC may provide a valuable alternative to a client who cannot afford a lengthy wrongful dismissal suit. Additionally, claimants may choose to pursue a wrongful dismissal suit alongside a human rights complaint. Complainants who pursue dual claims will not be able to benefit from “double recovery.” An employee who believes that they were discriminated against in relation to their employment may have more than one procedural option to choose from:

### ***a) Employer’s Internal Complaint Procedure***

Assuming one exists, this is the most immediate way to obtain a remedy. There is typically a heavy burden on the employee however; as witnesses may be reluctant to come forward and legal counsel is usually not retained at this stage.

### ***b) Grievance and Arbitration (Union)***

Unionized workers are entitled to representation by their union. If the union backs out of its obligation, the worker may wish to file a human rights complaint and may even decide to name the union as a party if the worker has grounds to believe the union is complicit in the alleged discrimination. Generally speaking, it will not be enough for a breach of the *Code* where the allegation is that the union has not adequately represented the employee, the union must have engaged in the discrimination. However, initiating the grievance procedure is a best first option, followed by a human rights complaint. A grievance and a complaint can also be filed in tandem. If the matter is not resolved during the initial stages of the union grievance procedure, an arbitration hearing may be held and an arbitrator will determine liability and relief.

### ***c) Human Rights Complaint***

Another option is, of course, to file a human rights complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal (see above for the grounds, areas, exemptions, and complaint process, etc.) or, under federal jurisdiction, with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (see below for the grounds, areas, exemptions, and process, etc). The Tribunal can also award lost wages and damages for injury to dignity. However, note that if a complainant is also seeking severance pay and/or punitive damages in a civil suit, they will not be allowed to recover from both proceedings.

### ***d) Employment Standards Branch***

Employees may choose to file a complaint through the Employment Standards Branch (ESB) self-help kit if their employer has breached the Employment Standards Act (see **Chapter 6: Employment Law**). There is a **six-month** limitation period from the date of the breach and once a complaint has been filed with the ESB, the complainant is barred from initiating a court action on the same matter. Remedies awarded by the Employment Standards Tribunal are intended to make the employee “whole” financially by way of compensation rather than reinstatement. If the complainant is seeking reinstatement they should consider pursuing the issue through the Human

Rights Tribunal. It is important to note though, that the ESB does not deal with alleged discrimination.

### *e) Civil Action*

A final option is to bring a civil action for wrongful dismissal either in Small Claims Court (see **Chapter 22: Small Claims**) or BC Supreme Court, depending on the amounts claimed. However, a recent Supreme Court decision clarified that the common law will not provide a remedy for discrimination per se in the employment context. Please refer to *Keays v Honda*, 2008 SCC 39 at para 67 [*Keays*].

The court in *Keays* held that breaches of the HRC must be remedied within the statutory scheme of the Code itself. So even if the reason for dismissal was discriminatory, in a civil action, the complainant will generally only be able to recover damages based on an unjustified dismissal and/or inadequate notice (severance pay). See **Chapter 6: Employment Law**. Accordingly, compensation for the discrimination itself must proceed before the Tribunal.

The court may further compensate the complainant in a civil action if the employer has acted unfairly or in bad faith when dismissing an employee. The basis for these additional damages is a breach of the implied term of an employment contract that employers will act in good faith in the manner of dismissal (i.e. payment for such damages can be deemed to have been in the contemplation of the parties at the formation of the contract). In *Keays* the Supreme Court held that any such additional award must be compensatory and must be based on the actual loss or damage suffered by the employee, which can include expenses related to mental distress stemming from the manner of dismissal. Compensable conduct might include, but is not limited to, attacking the employee's reputation at the time of dismissal, misrepresentations regarding the reason for the dismissal, or dismissal meant to deprive the employee of a pension benefit or other right such as permanent status. However, normal distress and hurt feelings arising from the dismissal itself are not grounds for additional damages.

The courts are even more conservative in their approach to awarding punitive damages meant to punish the employer for their conduct in dismissal. Punitive damages will only be awarded if the employer's conduct was harsh, vindictive, reprehensible, malicious and extreme in its nature. Thus, if the complainant is primarily concerned with being compensated for injuries to their dignity and/or denouncing their employer's discriminatory behaviour, then they should file a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal alongside a civil action for wrongful dismissal.

Whatever procedural route an employee ultimately chooses, if an employee is experiencing on-going harassment on a prohibited ground of discrimination, he or she should maintain records or a journal with dates, times, places, witnesses, details of particular incidents, and even a description of the emotional effects of the harassment.

## ***D. Remedies***

Remedies should be considered first when deciding whether or not to pursue a claim in any administrative tribunal. Available remedies for a justified complaint are listed in s 37(2) of the HRC.

**Non-pecuniary remedies include:** an order that the respondent cease the discriminatory conduct; a declaratory order that the conduct complained of is, in fact, discriminatory; and an order that the respondent take steps to ameliorate the effects of the discrimination such as the implementation of human rights policy and training. Clients seeking advice on crafting should be directed to The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal website, which provides detailed information on the availability and applicability of specific remedies (see **Section I.B: Resources**).

**Pecuniary remedies include:** compensation for lost wages/salary or expenses, re-instatement of a lost benefit, and compensation for injury to dignity. Unlike severance pay, compensation for lost wages is not based on the concept of reasonable notice. A successful complainant may recover lost wages for the entire period between their dismissal and the hearing date if they can show that they have been making reasonable efforts to find new employment. Damages awarded for injuries to dignity have increased over the last decade. Currently the highest award in BC is \$75,000, but that case is being judicially reviewed. Most damages in this category are under \$10,000. It is difficult to predict what level of damages the tribunal will award as it depends on many factors on a case by case basis.

Remember, to claim any type of damage you must be sure to lead evidence. If you fail to lead strong evidence as to the effect discrimination had on your emotional state and dignity, the Tribunal may not find any damage. Failure to mitigate one's losses can lead to the loss of a complainant's entitlement to wage loss compensation provided that the respondent is able to prove that the complainant has failed to mitigate his or her losses. Refer to *Cassidy v Emergency and Health Services Commission and another* (No 3), 2009 BCHRT 110 at para 34.

There is no maximum limit on damage awards. Note however that if a complainant seeks a remedy in both the Human Rights Tribunal (e.g. for lost wages) and in civil court (e.g. for severance pay) and are successful in both proceedings they must forfeit one award or the other as they are not entitled to double recovery. There are several cases where the award for loss of wages was in the range of \$300,000. See *Kelly* and *Kerr supra*.

Although the pecuniary remedies available under the HRC are meant to be compensatory in nature, not punitive, s 37(4) does give the Tribunal authority to order costs against either party as condemnation of improper conduct during the Tribunal processes. This order is independent of a finding that the complaint is justified. Additionally, s 37(2) gives the Tribunal the right to award compensation for expenses that are directly caused by the discrimination found which may include expenses such as wage loss due to the need to attend a hearing.

The Tribunal will not provide remedies in every situation where there has been real or perceived discrimination. For example, the Tribunal will not award damages for lost wages/salary following a discriminatory dismissal but during a period for which the complainant was medically incapable of working. Please refer to *Senyk v WFG Agency Network* (No. 2), 2008 BCHRT 376 at para 434. This is because even absent the discrimination the complainant would not have been able to earn wages or a salary.

A final order of the Tribunal may be registered in the B.C. Supreme Court so that it is enforceable as though it were an order of the court. No appeal procedure is provided for in the HRC, but the *Judicial Review Procedure Act*, RSBC 1996, c. 241 may be of some assistance if a client is dissatisfied with the Tribunal's decision (see **Chapter 20: Public Complaint Procedures**).

## ***E.* Costs**

The general rule is that costs will not normally be awarded in a human rights case. However, pursuant to s 37(4) of the HRC, the purpose of awarding costs has been to penalize a party who acts improperly during a hearing, thereby interfering with the objective of the Tribunal. In these cases costs are awarded punitively and do not necessarily reflect the actual expenses suffered by the other party due to the improper conduct.

## ***F. Judicial Review***

If an individual disagrees with a decision by a Tribunal, he or she may appeal to the Supreme Court of British Columbia for a “judicial review” A judicial review differs from an appeal to a higher court. In an appeal, the court has the authority to decide whether or not it agrees with a decision. In a judicial review, the B.C. Supreme Court simply decides whether or not there is a “ground” for review and may only disturb the Tribunal’s decision if it can demonstrate that the Tribunal:

- Made an “error of law”, e.g., an incorrect interpretation of the HRC
- Made a finding of fact that is unreasonable or based on lack of evidence
- Acted unfairly with regards to the rules of procedure and natural justice
- Disregarded legislative requirements; used its discretion arbitrarily, in bad faith, or for an improper purpose; and/or based its decisions on irrelevant factors

If the Tribunal has made any of these errors, the Court may set aside the decision and will usually direct the Tribunal to re-hear the case. Section 57 of the Administrative Tribunals Act mandates that an application for a judicial review must be submitted within 60 days of the date the decision was issued; however, the Court may extend the time in limited circumstances. In order to seek a judicial review, an individual is required to prepare a petition and affidavit, file the petition and affidavit at the B.C. Supreme Court, and serve a copy of the filed petition and affidavit on the Tribunal, the Attorney General of British Columbia, and any person whose interests may be affected by the order you desire the Court to make.

## ***G. Reasons Why the Complaint May Not Proceed***

As mentioned above, the Tribunal may refuse to accept a complaint for filing because it does not have jurisdiction due to the nature of the complaint or when it was brought. Once a complaint has been filed, however, the Tribunal may nevertheless dismiss it prior to hearing on application from the respondent for a variety of reasons (s 27). Among the reasons the Tribunal may dismiss a filed complaint are (check the HRC for a complete list):

### ***1. Complaint Outside the Tribunal’s Jurisdiction***

The Tribunal will not proceed with a complaint where it is persuaded that the complaint is not, in fact, based on a form of discrimination enumerated by the HRC, or that the complaint falls within the federal jurisdiction. In addition, even if the Tribunal accepts a complaint for filing, the respondent may still have the option to dispute jurisdiction.

### ***2. Substance of Complaint Dealt with by Another Proceeding***

Where another proceeding, such as a labour arbitration, has adequately resolved the substance of a complaint, it will usually be dismissed. A complaint may also be deferred if such an alternative proceeding is pending. The number or other proceedings capable of adequately dealing with a human rights complaint are quite limited.

### ***3. No Reasonable Basis for Holding a Hearing***

The Tribunal may discontinue proceedings where the Tribunal is persuaded that the complaint is made in bad faith, would be of no benefit, would not further the purposes of the HRC, and/or has no reasonable prospect of success. The most recent Annual Reports from the BCHRT indicate that 55% of cases were dismissed on preliminary application under s 27 of the HRC. Please refer to *Marquez v Great Canadian Casinos and another (No 2)*, 2011 BCHRT 117 at para 29-38.

#### ***4. Complaint Brought Outside Limitation Period***

As mentioned above, there is a general **six-month** limitation period. The six-month period begins from the last instance of any continuing discrimination. It is not always clear which date will be used to determine the limitation date. The issue of whether, or how many, multiple instances of discrimination should be considered a “continuing contravention” (thus effectively extending when the six-month period) is often disputed. See *Mercer v Loga*, 2008 BCHRT 217 at para 7-11 for the most recent discussion of how to define a “continuing contravention”; see also *O’Hara v BC (Human Rights Commission)*, 2003 BCCA 139 at para 8-25.

Additionally, under s 22(3) of the HRC, the six month time limit may be extended, regardless of whether there is a “continuing contravention”, if it is in the public interest to accept the late complaint and no substantial prejudice is caused to any party. When seeking an extension of the time limit, the complainant bears the burden of establishing both of the requirements of s 22(3). Refer to *Chartier v School District No 62*, 2003 BCHRT 39 at para 10-14. Both the reason for the delay and its length are factors, among others, that may be important considerations in determining whether it is in the public interest to accept a late-filed complaint. Please refer to *Earnshaw v Lihydale Cooperative and UFCW, Local 1518*, 2005 BCHRT 146 at para 19-27.

### **IV. THE CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* [CHRA] prohibits certain forms of discrimination in the federal jurisdiction. As mentioned above, that jurisdiction is set out in s 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. The CHRA applies to both public and private bodies and individuals and covers federal departments and agencies, federal Crown corporations, chartered banks, the broadcast media, airlines, buses and railways that travel between provinces, First Nations, and other federally regulated industries such as mining operations.

#### ***A. Prohibited Grounds of Discrimination***

The eleven prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, conviction for which a pardon has been granted, and mental or physical disability (including previous or present alcohol dependence). These grounds apply to all activities covered by the CHRA. Section 3(2) explicitly makes discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy illegal and s 14(2) explicitly prohibits sexual harassment.

Note that the federal equal pay provisions are broader than the provincial ones since it is discriminatory practice to pay different wages to female and male employees for work of “equal value”, even if the work itself is not similar. Factors considered when defining “equal value” include skills required, responsibilities, and working conditions. Pursuant to s 65(1), employers are liable for the discriminatory acts of their employees.

#### ***B. Activities Where Discrimination is Prohibited***

The activities where discrimination is prohibited include:

- a) the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation customarily available to the general public;
- b) the provision of commercial premises or residential accommodation;
- c) employment, employment application advertising, and membership in, or benefit from, employee organizations;

- d) publication of discriminatory notices, signs, symbols, emblems or other representations;
- e) situations where an individual filed a complaint under the CHRA; and
- f) communication of “hate” messages.

### ***C. Exceptions***

Under s 15, there are general exceptions to practices considered discriminatory, comparable but not identical to those found in BC’s HRC, such as those relating to bona fide occupational requirements, pension plans, and insurance schemes. Retirement policies are still exceptions under ss 9 & 15 of the CHRA which is now a significant difference from the HRC of BC, where mandatory retirement is now generally prohibited.

Section 16 of the CHRA (similar to s 42 of the B.C. HRC) states that an Equity plan designed to reduce the disadvantage suffered by a group of individuals, where that disadvantage is related to one of the grounds discussed above, is not discrimination in and of itself.

Previously, s 67 of the CHRA stated that the CHRA did not apply to the Indian Act, with the result that any actions taken by band councils or the federal government under the Indian Act were exempt from the CHRA. Section 67 has since been repealed, which was a contentious move among some First Nations leaders.

### ***D. Filing a Complaint Under the Act***

Any individual or group may file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. If someone other than the alleged victim files a complaint, the Commission may refuse to proceed without the victim’s consent. The Commission itself may lay a complaint or it may discontinue an investigation if it deems the complaint to be frivolous or if other alternatives would be more appropriate.

The Commission will provide advice and assistance in proceeding with the complaint. Correspondence may be addressed to the Ottawa office but in practice it is generally preferable to deal with the Commission’s Vancouver office. Please consult the Commission’s website for a detailed description of the complaint process (see **Section I.B: Resources**, above).

#### ***1. How Complaints are Handled***

It is, in most cases, both possible and preferable that complaints be resolved through discussions leading to mutual agreement. To facilitate this, the CHRA provides for an investigation stage and, where necessary, a conciliatory stage. By law, the complaint investigator cannot also be the conciliator, although in practice the investigator attempts to resolve the dispute whenever possible.

Instead of, or subsequent to, these stages, the Commission may refer the complaint to a quasi-judicial Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The Commission has the power to assist the complainant at all stages of the process, and usually represents the complainant at the hearing stage. However, it acts in a more neutral fashion at the investigation and mediation stages. Please note that the caveat about the difficulty of proving specific discrimination, mentioned in regard to the BC HRC, also applies to the federal CHRA.

The Tribunal may award damages and relief similar to an injunction. An order of the Tribunal is enforceable as if it were an order of the Federal Court. Any judicial review is governed by the limitation period set out in the Federal Courts Act, R.S. 1985, c. F-7 (see **Chapter 20: Public Complaints Procedures**).

It is an offence, punishable on summary conviction, to obstruct any investigation under the CHRA (s 60).

The Canadian Human Rights Act limits the amount of damages that can be sought for injury to dignity to \$20,000. However, unlike the HRC, which is not punitive but remedial, the federal tribunal can award up to \$20,000 in damages where they believe the discriminatory conduct was done with recklessness or wilful disregard.

## ***2. Reasons Why Complaints May Not Proceed***

Section 41 of the CHRA lists the most common reasons for the termination of an investigation. The reasons are very similar to those discussed under the HRC, including:

- a) the complaint is beyond the jurisdiction of the Commission;
- b) the complaint could more appropriately be dealt with under another Act;
- c) the complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious, or made in bad faith;
- d) the complainant has not exhausted all reasonable alternative grievance or review procedures (if collective agreement or arbitration procedures are available, the client will be expected to pursue them); and
- e) the complaint was not filed within **one year** of the alleged act of discrimination (the Commission has the power to extend this period in certain circumstances).

## **V. B.C. CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTION ACT**

The Ministry of the Attorney General administers the Civil Rights Protection Act, which defines a prohibited act and civil remedies or damages that may be available for victims of such acts. The types of actions and remedies available under the Act may not be suitable for all clients, as these actions are tortious in nature and are heard in the Supreme Court. Usually the HRC or CHRA, whichever applies, will provide more useful protection.

The more pertinent points of the legislation are:

- “Prohibited act” is defined as conduct or communications that interfere with civil rights by promoting hatred or contempt or by promoting the inferiority or superiority of groups classified by colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, or place of origin (s 1).
- The Attorney General may choose to intervene in such actions, but, in any case, the Attorney General must be notified within 30 days of the start of an action (s 3).
- Types of damages: general or exemplary. The court may order other types of relief such as an injunction in addition to or in lieu of damages (s 4).
- For an offence under the Act, a person may be liable for a fine up to \$2,000 and/or six months imprisonment. A corporation or other public body may be liable for a fine of up to \$10,000, and any directors or top personnel who were or should have been aware of the offending conduct may be found personally liable (s 5).

## VI. RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

### A. *School*

#### 1. *Compulsory Attendance and Registration*

The *School Act*, RSBC 1996, c 412 states that all children must be enrolled by the first school day of a school year if, on or before December 31 of that school year, the child will have reached the age of 5 years (s 3(1)(a)). Parents may, however, defer enrolment until the first school day of the next school year (i.e. until age 6) (s 3(2)). Once enrolled, children must remain in an educational program until they are 16 (s 3(1)(b)). Whether children attend public or private schools, they must be registered on or before September 30 in each year either with a school or with the Minister (s 13). Students must also comply with the rules, code of conduct, and policies set by the Board or school (s 6).

Under s 12 of the School Act, parents are authorized to educate their children at home or elsewhere provided they register their children pursuant to s 13.

#### 2. *Discipline*

The *Criminal Code* (s 43) allows a schoolteacher to use discipline that is reasonable in the circumstances. This section refers to the use of reasonable force (see the definition given by the Supreme Court of Canada under **Section XI.C**, above). However, the *School Act* specifically states that discipline of a student must be similar to that of a kind, firm, and judicious parent, but must not include corporal punishment (s 76(3)).

#### 3. *Rights of Parents and Students*

Students and parents have the right to consult with a teacher or administrative officer (*School Act*, ss 4 and 7(2)). As well as having the right to information regarding the attendance, behaviour and progress of their children in school (s 7(1)(a)), parents may request an annual report on the general effectiveness of the program their children are enrolled in, without their children's consent. They are also entitled to belong to a parent's advisory council (s 7(1)(c)). The councils can be formed by application to the Board or Minister of Education, and can advise the Board and staff of the school (s 8).

#### 4. *School Records*

Individual students and their parents are entitled to examine, on request, all records pertaining to that student while accompanied by the principal or a person designated by the principal (*School Act*, s 9). Student records identifying the student will not be released to other parties except when required by law, or if the student or parent consents to the disclosure in writing.

#### 5. *Language of Instruction*

Every student in B.C. is entitled to instruction in English (*School Act*, s 5). However, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, students whose parents are citizens of Canada have the right to receive primary and secondary school instruction in either English or French if:

- their parents' first language is that of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province in which they reside, and they still understand that language; or
- their parents received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French

and the parent resides in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province.

## **6. Other Concerns**

The *School Act* states that public schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles (s 76(1)).

*Moore v British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61 at para 36 determined that BC had discriminated against a dyslexic boy when it cut the special needs program during a financial crisis. The SCC found that he was denied a service customarily available to the public. The service denied was not access to a special needs program, but meaningful access to education generally. Discrimination was found because the cuts disproportionately affected special needs programs and there was no evidence that BC considered other options.

Parents are jointly and severally liable for intentional or negligent damage to school property caused by their children (s 10). There is no action against a Board or its employees unless the actionable conduct included dishonesty, gross negligence, malicious or wilful misconduct, or the cause of action is libel or slander (s 94(2)). Section 94 does not absolve a Board from vicarious liability.

Any person who believes a child, whether registered or not, is not receiving an educational program can make a report to the superintendent of schools (s 14(1)). An action lies against that person only if the report is made maliciously (s 14(3)).

School boards have a duty to provide an educational environment that is free from discriminatory harassment. This rule was affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada on October 20, 2005, when it upheld a BC Human Rights Tribunal finding of discrimination against a BC school board in the homophobic harassment of one of its students: see *Board of School Trustees of School District No 44 (North Vancouver) v Azmi Jubran, et al* [2005] SCCA No. 260 at para 91-102 (with costs and without reasons). Note that while the student was found to have been discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, it was irrelevant whether he identified himself as homosexual, or whether his harassers knew or believed him to be homosexual.

## **B. Medical Attention**

### **1. Obligation to Provide Treatment**

The *Criminal Code* (s 215) imposes criminal sanctions on parents who fail to provide their children with the necessities of life until they reach the age of 16. This has been held to include adequate medical treatment, and a court may also extend the duty to an older child who cannot become independent of their parent(s) due to factors including age and illness. Section 218 of the *Criminal Code* imposes criminal sanctions on any person who abandons or exposes a child less than 10 years of age to the risk of permanent injury, damage to his or her health, or risk to his or her life.

Under the CFCSA, children under the age of 19 may be removed if they are deprived of necessary medical attention, but only by a court order (s 29). Where a child is removed, emergency medical care can be given at the Director's authorization (s 32). In cases where the only issue is the parents' refusal of necessary medical attention, the Director can apply for a court order authorizing the medical care without removing the child from the parents' custody (s 29).

## 2. *Consent to Treatment*

In Canadian case law, the courts have found that a minor can consent to treatment as a “mature minor” if that particular person has the mental capacity to understand the nature and risks of that particular treatment (see also *Infants Act*, s 17). A minor, who is living away from home, working, or married, may be found to be autonomous, and free from parental control, and thus capable of consenting to or refusing treatment on his or her own behalf.

Under the *Infants Act*, (s 17), a minor can consent to surgical, medical, mental, or dental treatment without the agreement of their parents, so long as the health care provider has: i) explained to the infant and has been satisfied that the infant understands the nature and consequences and the reasonably foreseeable benefits and risks of the health care; and ii) has made reasonable efforts to determine and has concluded that the health care is in the infant's best interests. This includes requests for birth control advice and products, and for abortions.

A court of competent jurisdiction may order medical treatment for any child if the court is satisfied that such treatment is required, and that parental consent is being unreasonably withheld. This is part of the inherent *parens patriae* (guardian of persons under a legal disability) jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, and is now codified under s 29 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA].