



ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

2024-25

Justice

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Accountability Report 2024–2025

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Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Justice for the year ended March 31, 2025, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the Department of Justice outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments, and opinions by Department of Justice management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of Department of Justice management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Department of Justice 2024-25 Business Plan.

Original signed by

Honourable Becky Druhan

Minister of Justice and Attorney General

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Introduction

The Department of Justice tracks performance in key areas, policies and programs that support government's overall priorities. In 2024-25, the Department continued to work diligently on advancing these priorities to support a justice system that is responsive to the needs of all Nova Scotians. We are pleased to report that progress has been made in all these areas, as described below.

Measuring Our Performance: Priority Areas

Address systemic inequity and racism in the justice system and government and improve services for those dealing with addictions and mental health conditions

Actions to address systemic discrimination

The Department has taken a variety of actions to address systemic discrimination in the justice system. The Department continued to support the implementation of recommendations from the Halifax, Nova Scotia: Street Checks Report (the Wortley Report). The Wortley Report Research Committee submitted its final report, *Recommended Approach for the Collection of Race-Based Data for Police Stops in Nova Scotia*, to the Minister of Justice, for review and consideration.

The development of a Nova Scotia Justice Action Plan for African Nova Scotians and Black people of African Descent is being informed by extensive community engagement and will outline actions addressing the issue of systemic anti-Black racism in the justice system.

Internal and external engagement with Indigenous and non-Indigenous justice agencies and partners has taken place and will be used to inform an Indigenous Justice Action Strategy. Ongoing work continued with the Mi'kmaq Legal Support Network to coordinate activities with federal funding managers to identify opportunities for funding support. The Department continued to participate on the Indigenous Court Worker Tripartite Working Group, the Aboriginal Justice Working Group on Indigenous Justice Strategy, and the Tripartite Justice Working Committee as part of the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum.

On February 27, 2025, government [announced plans to modernize](#) the way the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission protects the rights of Nova Scotians and administers the province's human rights dispute resolution process.

The Department also [announced additional funding](#) for Nova Scotia Legal Aid (NSLA) to help ensure vulnerable Nova Scotians have access to the legal advice and supports they need, and promote fair and efficient functioning of the justice system. NSLA received additional funding of \$3.98 million for 2024-25.

Actions to address mental health and addictions

Addressing the complex relationship between addictions, mental health, and the justice system requires coordinated efforts among government agencies, justice sector partners, and community organizations. The Department further expanded access to transitional housing for individuals

reintegrating into community, offering in-kind services to support organizations such as John Howard Society, Elizabeth Fry Society, Holly House, and others. The Department continued to offer partnering organizations with access to community or forensic social workers, when requested.

In June 2024, the Department announced the Public Safety Personnel Online Therapy Program (PSPNET) would [continue following the success of a two-year pilot program](#). It is offered in collaboration with the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. The program aims at improving the mental health of Nova Scotia's first responders and other public safety personnel, and offers cognitive behavioural therapy for people experiencing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Court Services continued to participate in the administration of therapeutic Wellness Courts, and Victim Services continued to offer programs for victims of serious crimes through the Criminal Injuries Counselling Program. In October 2024, [additional funding for the Criminal Injuries Counselling Program](#) was provided, allowing for the expansion of the program to include victims of gender-based violence, victims of hate crimes, and more competitive pay for counsellors.

The Sherriff Services Peer-to-Peer Outreach Team, comprised of selected and trained Sherriff Services employees, continued to support coworkers experiencing workplace, emotional, or family difficulties. As of December 2024, the Team had completed 218 contacts and interactions.

Collaborate on government's response to the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) Recommendations and Desmond Fatality Inquiry (DFI) Recommendations

The final report of the MCC recommended a multi-sectoral council be established to review the structure of policing in Nova Scotia and make recommendations. In 2024-25, an engagement advisory group comprised of people from the provincial government, police agencies, subject matter experts and equity-deserving groups, was established to inform the work. As part of the review, Nova Scotians were asked for their input; more than 7,000 responses were received online and in-person, in addition to [in-person engagement sessions](#) held in Fall 2024.

In September 2024, [modernized policing standards](#) for all police agencies were released to ensure consistent service delivery across Nova Scotia. The new standards represent five technical areas of policing that affect public safety, including critical incident response; police investigations; police service, including organization; records management; and use of force. A Public Safety Audit Unit was also created to measure all police agencies against the 39 standards.

The Department continued to support the implementation of DFI recommendations. Throughout the year, Nova Scotia's Chief Firearms Officer (CFO) worked collaboratively with partners to advance recommendations related to training and information sharing. As a result of this collaboration, the Provincial Firearms Office was awarded an additional \$204,608 in federal funding per year starting in 2025-26 to support the implementation of federal Bill C-21. The Bill will make it mandatory for CFOs to revoke a licence within 24 hours if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a licence holder may have engaged in an act of domestic violence or stalking.

Finally, in February 2025, the Department of Justice created a new Gender-Based Violence Division. This division will be deeply connected to the Inquiry Response work related to gender-based violence and initiatives aligned with the key government priority of addressing intimate partner violence.

Lead work to modernize key pieces of legislation

In 2024-25, working with the Departments of Service Nova Scotia and Cyber Security and Digital Solutions, the Department of Justice continued leading a comprehensive review of the information, access and privacy legislative framework in Nova Scotia. The Department began developing recommendations for modernizing the legislation.

Amendments were made to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* in February 2025 to authorize the head of a public body to disregard frivolous and vexatious applications for access to information, on approval of the Privacy Commissioner. In addition, the *Justice Administration Amendment Act* updated four pieces of legislation:

- The *Powers of Attorney Act* was further modernized to better clarify roles and responsibilities
- The *Adult Capacity and Decision-Making Act* was amended to improve the application process
- The *Interpretation Act* was changed to ensure legislation is automatically repealed if it has not been proclaimed after ten or more years
- The *Provincial Court Act* was updated, and the *Family Court Act* was repealed, to reflect that family law matters are now heard in the unified family court and to better clarify roles and responsibilities

The Department continued to offer two programs through the Justice Supports and Services Division that align with this focus on victim supports: the Independent Legal Advice Program (ILA) and the Sexual Offence Legal Representation Program (SOLR). ILA provides free, independent legal advice to adult survivors of sexual assault. SOLR provides complainants in sexual offence cases with legal representation when court applications are made to access a complainant's records under Criminal Code Sections 276 & 278.

In 2024-2025, the ILA Program supported 201 adult victims/survivors aged 16 and above. Over the past five years, the number of victims supported through this program has more than doubled.

In 2024-25, SOLR received 72 applications for legal representation, all of which were approved. Applications are approved based on the nature of the records being sought. Approved records include those related to sexual history, as well as medical, therapeutic, and/or counselling records. In 2024-25, the types of records for which legal representation is provided was expanded to include text messages, emails, and social media.

Lead work to create an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030

In 2024-25, the Department's Accessibility Directorate continued to lead the work toward the implementation of the *Accessibility Act* and Access by Design 2030. An important step on the way to an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030 was achieved through the adoption of the first of six accessibility standards. The Built Environment Accessibility Standard was approved by Governor in Council and [released to the public](#) in March 2025. Work progressed across the remaining standard areas. The Accessibility Advisory Board's [recommendations for standard in employment](#) was made public in October 2024, and members were named to the Information and Communications and Public Transportation Standard Development Committees in the summer of 2024. The recommendations for the Goods and Services standard are anticipated to be submitted to the Minister in 2025-26.

The Directorate continued to support prescribed public-sector bodies (PPSBs) in the development and implementation of their accessibility plans and initiatives by offering webinars, developing toolkits and templates, and offering one-on-one assistance. By March 31, 2025, 106 out of 108 PPSBs had completed their accessibility plans and were compliant with the *Accessibility Act*.

In April 2024 the Accessibility Directorate launched the Accessibility First Voice Experts Roster. Nova Scotians with disabilities are invited to sign up to provide their advice on accessibility projects, such as awareness activities, training and educational materials, and policy and program development. The roster is a way to open the opportunity to provide lived experience advice so any Nova Scotian with a disability can participate in making Nova Scotia more accessible.

Work to modernize the court system to improve access to justice

In 2024-25, the Department's Digital Task Force, co-led by the Department of Justice and the Judiciary, continued to implement the Road Map for digital transformation. In collaboration with the Department of Cyber Security and Digital Solutions, work began on an e-filing and digital document management platform for the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal.

Additionally, in 2024-25, the Department collaborated with the Department of Cyber Security and Digital Solutions to develop a digital scheduling tool to allow the Chief Judge of Nova Scotia to effectively schedule criminal matters. The tool also has functionality to be rolled out more broadly across the province.

Financial Results

	2024-2025 Estimate	2024-2025 Actuals	2024-2025 Variance
Program & Service Area	<i>(\$thousands)</i>		
Departmental Expenses:			
Administration	8,384	8,967	583
Policy and Information Management	2,869	2,543	(326)
Legal Services	21,367	20,769	(598)
Nova Scotia Legal Aid	29,538	35,692	6,154
Court Services	85,326	88,552	3,226
Correctional Services	84,831	95,773	10,942
Public Trustee	3,365	3,432	67
Nova Scotia Medical Examiner Service	6,082	8,109	2,027
Public Safety and Security	203,291	200,197	(3,094)
Serious Incident Response Team	1,467	1,529	62
Accessibility Directorate	2,442	2,573	131
Maintenance Enforcement and Victim Services	15,757	16,878	1,121
Total: Departmental Expenses	464,719	485,014	20,295
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenue	1,595	2,818	1,223
Fees and Other Charges	20,581	30,557	9,976
Ordinary Recoveries	150,758	145,456	(5,302)
Total: Revenue, Fees, and Recoveries	172,934	178,831	5,897
TCA Purchase Requirements	1,788	1,948	160
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	1,739.9	1,640.1	(99.8)

Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

The Department of Justice's 2024-25 actual spending were \$20.3M or 4.4 per cent higher than estimate, primarily due to \$7.2 million for Correctional Services, Victim Services and Sheriff Services casual and relief staff and WCB costs, \$4.0 million increased funding to Nova Scotia Legal Aid for amending *Legal Aid General Regulations and Tariff of Fees* under the *Legal Aid Act*, \$3.8 million for Correctional Services operating pressures including \$1.0 million for food costs, \$2.2 million in fully recoverable additional federal funding for Legal Aid which was announced in the federal budget, \$0.7 million for Criminal Injuries Counselling Services, \$1.5 million for Medical Examiner Service operating pressure, including \$1.1 million for pathology, toxicology and other health services caused by increased caseload.

Revenue, Fees, and Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Ordinary Revenue:

The Department of Justice ordinary revenue of \$1.2 million or 76.7 percent higher than estimate primarily due to higher-than-anticipated Criminal Code fines collections.

Fees and Other Charges:

The Department of Justice fees and other charges were \$10 million or 48.5 percent higher than estimate primarily due to higher-than-anticipated Probate Fees collected by Court Services.

Ordinary Recoveries:

The Department of Justice recoveries were \$5.3 million or 3.5 percent lower than the estimate primarily due to the exemption given to municipalities from contributing to the annual cost of Correctional Services in the Service Exchange Agreement. These decreases are partially offset by increased Nova Scotia Legal Aid federal funding, increased recoverable expenses through the NB-NS Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT) agreement, increased recoverable fees for Medical Examiner Service, and additional Correctional Services recoveries due to secondments to NSGEU.

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

The variance is due to the timing of vacancies being filled throughout the fiscal year.

Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Each Department and Public Service Office Accountability Report must report with respect to the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* (PIDWA). **This requirement applies to all Departments/Public Service Offices/Governmental Units including Crown Corporations and Agencies.**

Annual Report under Section 18 of the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act*

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations;
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets;
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment; or,
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing.

Please use the following format to satisfy the disclosure obligation:

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Department of Justice:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2024-25
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	n/a
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing. (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	n/a