

Government plans training for 36 new sheriffs

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The B.C. government is planning to train 36 new sheriffs after insufficient numbers led to trial delays across the province over the past few months.

The Ministry of Attorney-General cut the equivalent of 34 full-time sheriffs in May, leading to several judges across B.C. closing courtrooms.

The new recruits start training on Aug. 31, according to an Aug. 17 email written by Dave Maedel, an acting assistant deputy minister with the ministry's court services branch.

By Nov. 9, the sheriffs should be ready to fill vacant positions across the province, including 15 spots in the Lower Mainland affected by the recent cuts.

Other cities expected to receive graduates are Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Kamloops, Cranbrook, Prince George, Fort St. John, Smithers, and Cranbrook.

"This will help to ease the pain," said Dean Purdy, who represents sheriffs for the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union.

According to BCGEU estimates, the 36 new recruits will boost provincial ranks to more than 400 sheriffs, still short of the roughly 525 employed a few years ago.

Purdy said the provincial government needs to replace those sheriffs, many of whom he said left for higher-paid positions elsewhere in law enforcement, including the RCMP.

"They're rolling the dice on safety inside our courtrooms," said Purdy, referring to the B.C. government. "More needs to be done."

Barry Penner, who recently stepped down as B.C. attorney-general, said in June there was not enough money to support the sheriffs in place at the time.

In a July statement, Penner said he was working to find additional dollars in the budget.

Neither Shirley Bond, the interim attorney-general, or any other ministry representative was available for comment Monday.

According to the email by Maedel, another recruitment effort is planned for January 2012 for an undetermined number of sheriffs.