



ALBERTA COURT OF JUSTICE

EDMONTON CRIMINAL DIVISION PRACTICE NOTE

SELF-REPRESENTED ACCUSED (SRA)

SUMMARY DISPOSITION PILOT PROJECT

Effective: September 1, 2026

Application

In Edmonton, accused persons who are in custody, having not yet spoken to release, appear in Courtroom 265. This is an extremely busy courtroom, where the demands on duty counsel, the Crown and the Court pose challenges for an accused who wishes to summarily dispose of their outstanding criminal charges. In practice, where an accused is expected to have served an anticipated sentence by their time in pre-trial custody, the Court will typically hear the summary disposition in Courtroom 265. This practice is intended to ensure that individuals are not unduly incarcerated beyond what would be a fit sentence for the offenses that are charged. Duty counsel is available in Courtroom 265 to assist such individuals with their summary disposition. For accused persons who are not believed to have served their time in pre-trial custody, it requires scheduling a date to summarily dispose of their outstanding matters in a courtroom that is intended for summary disposition proceedings, as Courtroom 265 does not have the necessary resources to hear such matters. This is problematic for self-represented accused persons, because there is no duty counsel assigned to the summary disposition court sittings in Edmonton. This pilot project is intended to remedy this issue.

Description of Pilot Project

In the spring of 2026, Legal Aid confirmed their intention to provide the service of a duty counsel half a day per week to assist self-represented accused from Courtroom 265 who wish to summarily dispose of their outstanding criminal charges, in circumstances where they are not expected to have served their time in pre-trial custody. Various options were considered, including taking timeslots from already overbooked summary disposition courtrooms or adding an addition half-day of court time for summary dispositions which would then require additional resources. Both were unacceptable.

A review of sitting times demonstrated that the courtroom with the most capacity for adjustment was mornings in Courtroom 353. This Courtroom is set aside for low complexity trials every morning. The average sitting time in the mornings made clear that adjustments can be made without causing undue strain on court resources.

Effective the week of August 24, 2026, self-represented accused from Courtroom 265 who wish to summarily dispose of their outstanding matters will be sent to the following Tuesday morning in Courtroom 353. The first functional 353 summary disposition morning will be September 1, 2026. The summary dispositions will be scheduled by the Case Management Office and by the duty counsel in Courtroom 265 upon the instructions of self-represented accused. Self-represented accused that are believed to have served their time in pre-trial custody will continue to have their summary disposition hearings heard in Courtroom 265.

Courtroom 353 will continue to have low complexity trials scheduled in the morning on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The number of available trial slots will increase from 10 slots/day to 12 slots/day. This increase in trial slots is intended to mitigate the risk of undue delay in obtaining trial dates, by ensuring that close to the same number of trial slots are available during the week. The average sitting times in the mornings in Courtroom 353 indicate that the court can accommodate two additional trial slots/day. Bail hearings will continue to be heard every afternoon in Courtroom 353.

This is a pilot project, initiated by members of Legal Aid, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Court. The overarching goal of all participants in the pilot project is to ensure that self-represented accused receive timely and meaningful access to justice without unduly adding to the strain of participants in Courtroom 265 or any of the summary disposition courtrooms. It is difficult to predict the demand for this service until the service is available. Thus far, the defined need for service relies upon the considerable anecdotal experience of those that participated in the pilot project discussions, and their colleagues. This pilot project will continue to be assessed and adjusted in the future if adjustments are considered advisable.

Dated this 18th day of August, 2026

The Honourable Joyce Lester
Assistant Chief Justice
Alberta Court of Justice
Edmonton Criminal Division