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[Our year-end message](#)

As the year comes to a close, I would like to thank all of you for your efforts on behalf of legal aid clients. Your advice and advocacy continue to be a critical component of access to justice for British Columbians with low incomes.

As you are aware, the Legal Services Society faced unexpected and significant budget pressures this year, largely due to increased efficiency in the Provincial Court and the resultant reduction in time that matters are taking to get to trial. LSS has worked hard with the Ministry of Justice to address the budget pressure without reducing services to clients. I am pleased to be able to confirm that the LSS board is now satisfied that we will be able to finish the fiscal year without service reductions. The LSS board thanks the Attorney General and her officials for their efforts in resolving this issue, particularly when the ministry is facing its own fiscal pressures.

It has been a challenging year for LSS. Resolving our budget pressures required significant time and effort, but we can also celebrate many successes. In particular, we are pleased with the number of organizations that have endorsed the justice reform initiatives LSS proposed in [Making Justice Work](#). We are also pleased with the success of our publications — particularly the publications explaining the new Family Law Act. In one month alone, LSS shipped more than 30,000 publications (almost 20 percent more than last year) to people wanting plain language information. Then there is the work you, our valued lawyers, did in 2013: more than 2,300 child protection referrals, almost 4,000 family law cases, 580 immigration referrals, and almost 19,000 criminal cases, as well as all the duty counsel work.

There will, of course, be challenges in the new year. The board is currently working on the 2014/15 budget, and in it there are significant service demand-driven pressures. When this has happened in the past, as it did this year, the board has looked at a number of options, including requesting a funding increase, using our accumulated reserves, deferring costs to future years, reducing expenses, reducing tariffs, or managing demand by restricting services. Whether any of these steps will be necessary in 2014/15 depends upon the level of demand we experience and the availability of resources. The provincial government's three-year budget plan committed an additional \$2 million to LSS in 2014/15 for innovation in improving criminal and family legal aid services, and we are looking forward to discussing the expenditure of those funds with the Ministry of Justice.

On behalf of the society's board, I wish each of you all the best in the new year. There will be challenges, but together we can improve the lives of those less fortunate.

Tom Christensen
LSS Board Chair

December 19, 2013

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