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Message from LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen

Last Friday, I was elected chair of the Legal Services Society's board of directors, succeeding David Crossin, QC, who reached the six-year limit for directors established in the *Legal Services Society Act*. The purpose of this message is to update you on LSS's discussions with the Ministry of Justice to address current fiscal pressures.

As you will know from Mark Benton, QC's [September Message to the tariff bar](#), LSS is facing a \$2.5 million deficit in the criminal tariff and a \$500,000 deficit in the child protection tariff, due primarily to the success of the government's and the Provincial Court's focus on making the courts more efficient. Cases are moving through courts more quickly and legal aid services are being provided earlier than expected. As a result, LSS is paying for more services this year than were contemplated when the ministry approved the society's budget for the 2013/2014 fiscal year.

Finding a solution is a challenge. The *Legal Services Society Act* requires LSS to balance its annual budget. Both deficit spending and increased funding would require approval from the government within a difficult fiscal environment.

Senior staff from LSS and the ministry have been engaged in discussions for some time now. Last Thursday, the entire LSS board met with Attorney General Suzanne Anton, QC, and her deputy ministers, and Mark Benton and I met with the Attorney General and her deputies again on Monday. The board also spent a significant portion of its meeting last Friday on this issue and is committed to finding a resolution that poses no risk to our clients and does not compromise your work as counsel. The Attorney General is similarly focused on finding a solution, and it is clear that there is a common interest in maintaining an effective justice system.

I am optimistic that a solution will be found in the immediate future. LSS will provide updates to you as soon as new information is available.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize David Crossin's term as chair. David has provided remarkable leadership in difficult times. His work at the board table and in the legal community has been key to LSS's recognition provincially, nationally, and internationally as a leader in legal aid and access to justice.

Finally, I would like to tell you a little of my background. The Law Society appointed me to the LSS board four years ago. I was called to the bar in 1995. While practising in Vernon, I accepted legal aid referrals. I remember holdbacks. I know how much people need our help. I served several terms as an MLA, and in that time held a number of cabinet posts. As Minister of Children and Family Development, I was proud to fund and support LSS initiatives to develop child protection mediation in BC. I also know what it's like to sit on the minister's side of the table when resources are scarce and the demands are important. That experience, together with the clear commitment of the LSS board and the Attorney General to finding a solution, provides the foundation for my optimism.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to making justice work in BC. We will keep you apprised of developments. As always, we welcome your feedback on how we can better support you at LawyersResources@lss.bc.ca.

Tom Christensen
Chair, LSS Board of Directors

September 25, 2013

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