



Legal Aid BC **Update**

From the office of Mark Benton, QC
Executive Director, Legal Services Society

August 20, 2012

This email newsletter is designed to keep you informed about developments at the Legal Services Society. It is distributed to chief executives of justice system stakeholders, Canadian legal aid plans and law-related organizations. Please forward this to anyone in your organization who might be interested. I welcome your feedback. For more information on legal aid in BC, visit the [LSS website](#) or LSS's [family law website](#).

New board members

Two new directors have been appointed to the LSS board by the provincial government. Annita L. McPhee and Puneet P.K. Sandhar replace Marion Wright, who passed away in January and Todd Ormiston, who is leaving the board. Annita is the president of the [Tahltan Central Council](#) and has extensive experience in Aboriginal business and economic development, financial management, and community outreach. Puneet is a lawyer with the [Sanghera Law Group](#) and her areas of practise include residential and commercial real estate transactions, incorporations, buying and selling businesses, leases, wills and estates, and representation agreements - she has also conducted a variety of immigration appeals.

LSS is governed by a nine-member board of directors. Five of the directors are appointed by the province's Lieutenant-Governor in Council, and four are appointed by the Law Society of BC.

LSS sends lawyers to national conferences

In July, LSS helped fund 64 legal aid lawyers to attend the [National Criminal Law Program Conference](#) in Victoria and 24 lawyers to attend the [National Family Program Conference](#) in Halifax. The conferences provided opportunity for legal aid lawyers to network with colleagues from across the country and to stay updated with legal developments.

Legal aid goes mobile

On May 17, LSS became one of the first legal aid organizations in Canada to go mobile with the launch of a new website that is accessible on smartphones such as iPhones and Blackberries. Through their mobile phones, clients can now access information such as where to get legal aid and how to apply for it, as well as locations and phone numbers for legal aid offices.

To access the mobile site, simply visit www.legalaid.bc.ca on your smartphone and follow the instructions.

2011-2012 Annual Report

In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, LSS provided more than 175,000 people with legal aid services. This success and other notable accomplishments are outlined in the [2011-2012 Annual Service Plan Report](#) that was tabled in the BC Legislature on July 25.

Literacy report to help increase access to legal aid

A [report](#) has been released outlining recommendations on how to make LSS' online resources more accessible to clients with varying literacy and technology capabilities. Among a number of findings, the report has provided recommendations such as identifying clients with literacy problems and training staff to work with these clients, developing a clearer definition of literacy to be used in LSS policies, materials and resources, and creating more Aboriginal-related social media content.

Public opinion poll

LSS recently commissioned a [public opinion poll](#) on legal aid that yielded a number of results. According to the poll, 74 per cent of British Columbians feel that legal aid should get the same funding priority as other social services. The poll also showed that 91 per cent of British Columbians continue to support maintaining legal aid services for people with low incomes.

New Criminal Case Management policy

In response to the growing complexity of large criminal cases, LSS has consolidated the Strategic Case Management Program and Large Case Management into a single, overarching [Criminal Case Management \(CCM\)](#) policy. The new CCM will ensure clarity, consistency, and transparency in the administration of long and complex criminal cases.

Terrace conference

In June, LSS' Public Legal Education and Information department held a conference in Terrace to provide updates on family and child protection law, and local legal aid resources services. Forty-five community workers from legal aid agencies, libraries, schools and health and Aboriginal organizations attended the conference.

Mark Benton, QC
Executive Director
Legal Services Society
mark.benton@lss.bc.ca