



Legal Aid BC **Update**

From the office of Mark Benton, QC
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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](#).

Marion Wright

I am sad to say that on January 16, LSS Board member Marion Wright passed away after a brief illness. Since 2009, Marion was a valued and important part of LSS. She contributed to the LSS Board by bringing an appreciation of how the justice system affects the daily lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities. For two years, Marion acted as the Governance Lead on the LSS Board and during that time, she made several significant recommendations that lead to the improvement of training procedures for future LSS board members. Marion's patience and compassion will be missed.

LSS to advise attorney general on justice reform

On February 8, BC's Attorney General, The Hon. Shirley Bond, announced that she was [requesting LSS's advice](#) on ways in which legal aid can be used to create efficiencies elsewhere in the justice system so that savings can be reallocated to enhance legal aid funding. The request is part of a [major review of BC's justice system](#) that was announced the same day. That review will be headed by former LSS board chair [Geoffrey Cowper, QC](#). LSS will be researching and preparing its advice over the next four months and will be consulting with justice system stakeholders and other legal aid plans.

Duty counsel withdrawal update

A number of BC lawyers are refusing to sign up for criminal duty counsel assignments to protest legal aid underfunding. The service withdrawal is organized by the [Trial Lawyers Association of BC](#). TLABC has stated publicly that its dispute is with the provincial government and not LSS. LSS has a statutory obligation to provide legal aid services and where local lawyers are not available, LSS is arranging for lawyers from other communities to handle duty counsel assignments. We have also instituted, with the cooperation of the judiciary, Crown counsel and court services, a telephone duty counsel service. [More information about the service withdrawal and LSS's response is available on our website.](#)

Community workers conference

On February 2, LSS held the Fraser Valley Regional Intermediaries Conference in Surrey, which was attended by 118 community workers from health services, libraries, family services, and a number of other groups that help low-income clients. The attendees were provided with a thorough overview of LSS services as well as other legal resources available. The response to this conference was so positive that LSS held a repeat conference on February 16, for another 100 people.

Mongolian delegation

In January, the LSS office hosted a delegation of Mongolian prosecutors who were here to learn more about the legal aid system in BC. The Mongolian delegation included Erdenbat Ganbat, the assistant prosecutor general, Munkhbaatar Otgonbayar, a prosecutor in the capital city's prosecution office and Erdentuya Ulambayer, a prosecutor who acted as the interpreter during the visit. LSS staff members David Griffiths, manager of legal services, and Malcolm Jeffcock, managing lawyer in criminal law, along with Administrative Crown Counsel Wendy Kavanagh, were the Canadian hosts who met with the delegation.

Aboriginal ad campaign

LSS's [Aboriginal Services](#) department will be running a series of legal aid ads over the next couple of months. Advertisements about LSS services and clinics being offered to Aboriginal individuals will run in a large number of BC newspapers and other publications.

LSS on Facebook

LSS has created a [Facebook page](#) to connect with more British Columbians and to update them with new legal aid resources and news. LSS is also managing social media accounts with [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) as well.

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