



Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

News Release

January 13, 2009

Statement regarding service and staff changes

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979.

Legal representation is available for serious family, child protection, and criminal issues. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal advice is available at most courts through duty counsel and by telephone through LawLINE and the Brydges Line (both are province-wide toll-free lines).

Legal information is available through Legal Information Outreach Worker (LIOW) services, LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Family Law in BC, LSS, and LawLINK websites. (See www.lss.bc.ca for most of our publications, our catalogue, and website links.)

To contact the LSS Call Centre and LawLINE, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).

Vancouver, BC — As many of you will be aware, there has been a significant increase in demand for legal aid. At the end of November 2008, referrals for emergency family services were up 21% over budget and criminal referrals by 5%. Immigration referrals were up 76% over the previous fiscal year. These increases are expected to continue in the 2009/2010 fiscal year which begins on April 1.

I do not expect government funding to be reduced in the next fiscal year, but neither do I anticipate any increase except for previously negotiated collective agreements and employment contracts and an additional \$2 million earmarked for the exceptional case fund.

Non-government funding is expected to decline. For example, the revenue from the Notary Foundation is budgeted to be more than \$2 million below what we budgeted in 2008/2009.

Faced with these challenges, the Legal Services Society's board of directors instructed the society to prepare a budget that brings service costs more in line with government funding for criminal, family services.

To achieve this, the society has made a number of changes to its staffing and operations, to the services it provides, and to the projects it was funding from non-government surplus revenues. This will enable LSS to refocus its resources and finances to ensure assistance is available within current funding for those most in need. These decisions will have a significant impact on LSS, the tariff bar and LSS clients and were extremely difficult for both the board and LSS staff.

The budget passed by the board in December includes the following changes.

SERVICE AND TARIFF CHANGES

We are in the process of advising the tariff bar of these changes and they will be provided with complete details at a later date.

Criminal tariff

- The \$40 administrative fee for all referrals will be eliminated after March 31, 2009.
- Tiered rates for criminal duty counsel will be eliminated after March 31, 2009.
- Also eliminated after March 31, 2009 will be all adult Category I offences.

Suite 400
510 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 3A8

Tel: (604) 601-6000
Fax: (604) 682-7967

- Out-of-custody duty counsel assignments will be eliminated in courthouses where LSS provides separate duty counsel for in-custody clients by June 30 2009.
- These measures are expected to save \$3.6 million annually.

Family and CFCSA tariff

- The administrative fee for all referrals will be eliminated after March 31, 2009.
- Dispute resolution referrals will be eliminated and extended services significantly reduced after March 31, 2009.
- Duty counsel services will be reduced in some courthouses at a date to be determined.
- The projected annual savings is \$1.6 million.

Immigration tariff

A notice to counsel issued on January 9, 2009 outlined changes to the immigration tariff. In summary, they are:

- Introduction of stricter merit screening of applications for Personal Information Form referrals.
- Management of Refugee Protection Division hearing referrals to remain within budget.
- Termination of hearing referrals issued on or after April 1, 2008 with the opportunity for clients to reapply closer to their hearing date.
- Introductions of stricter standards for approving referrals on applications made to the LSS Appeals Department.
- In addition, the administrative fee for all immigration referrals will be eliminated after March 31, 2009.
- These changes will assist LSS to manage the demand within the existing budget of \$1.7 million.

STAFF AND OPERATIONAL CHANGES

- There will be a 16 per cent reduction in staff in the Lower Mainland (38 positions) in April 2009. This includes elimination of the staff lawyer service delivery model in Vancouver and Surrey and a reduction in LawLINE staff.
- The reduction in the scope of a number of special projects will also result in a reduction of staff positions associated with those projects.
- The projected budget saving is \$2.5 million.

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS

- Several special projects that provide services over and above those the government funds and which LSS funds from non-government revenue have been reduced in scope. These included LawLINE, integration of legal aid services with social services, etc.

- This will result in an anticipated budget adjustment of \$5 million.
- LSS will also be using some of the project funds for an expanded duty counsel pilot project.
- Notwithstanding a total budget adjustment of 12.7 million, LSS will be required to use more than \$3.2 million of its non-government revenue to support criminal, family and child protection legal aid. If savings are greater than projected, additional money will be used to enhance duty counsel services.

OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC REVIEW

LSS will be conducting a review of selected business processes to look for operational efficiencies. This review will help LSS to deal with future changes in demand or future changes in funding with minimal disruption to its operations and infrastructure. Any recommendations for improvements to our current business process will be announced in July or August.

Later this year, the board of directors will conduct a strategic review of LSS's core services and how best to deliver those services with limited financial and staffing resources. Any recommendations or changes to the society's strategic direction will be announced at a later date.

For further information, contact:

Mark Benton, Executive Director,
Legal Services Society
(604) 601-6004