



Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

Media Release

For immediate release

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More legal aid for low-income people in BC

VANCOUVER – Families in crisis will benefit from several programs recently approved by the Legal Services Society that are designed to find timely and lasting solutions to family law problems.

“Whether it is a new program for people who don’t have lawyers in court, or funding to expand existing services, more families will have access to the legal information, advice, and representation they need,” said Mark Benton, QC, Executive Director of the Legal Services Society.

In addition to the family law services, the Legal Services Society’s board of directors at their December 11, 2009 meeting also approved new assistance for persons charged with minor criminal offences, funding to continue public legal education programs, and more support for Aboriginal legal aid services.

These and other initiatives are a direct result of the Legal Services Society’s commitment to reducing operating costs and refocusing non-government revenues on family and criminal law services. As a result, more of the society’s non-government money can now be allocated to helping people solve their legal problems. Some of the initiatives being introduced reinstate services the society was obliged to eliminate earlier in the year due to insufficient resources, others are new projects, and some provide ongoing funding for projects that were scheduled to end.

“Helping is our number one priority,” explained Benton. “We will have more lawyers in courthouses and at other locations for people with family and criminal law problems, our public legal education services will be available throughout the province, and we will be enhancing our commitment to Aboriginal communities.”

Implementation of the initiatives will take place throughout 2010.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

Summary of services to be introduced throughout 2010

- **Extended family services:** Restoring services for clients who qualify for legal aid but require assistance beyond the standard legal aid referral to ensure their safety or the safety of their children.
- **Family duty counsel enhancements:** Duty counsel are lawyers paid by LSS to assist people who do not have lawyers to represent them in court. Enhancements include new programs to provide legal advice between court appearances and outside the court setting, for example at Family Justice Centres, community agencies, friendship centres, and in partnership with other service providers.
- **Family services for related civil issues:** Restoring funding for clients who have legal issues, such as foreclosure, bankruptcy, housing and debt, that are related to a family law problem.
- **Family law website:** Funding will allow LSS to continue to offer up-to-date information and self-help materials on Canada's leading family law website familylaw.lss.bc.ca.
- **Family law resolution support:** New funding for lawyers to provide information to LSS regarding resolution of a client's family law issues. This will assist LSS in budget forecasting.
- **Community engagement:** Funding to continue public legal education initiatives around BC and in Aboriginal communities.
- **Initiatives for Aboriginal services:** Continuing funding for programs to ensure legal aid services are accessible and relevant to First Nations communities throughout BC.
- **Criminal duty counsel expansion:** New assistance for persons charged with minor criminal offences and additional support for lawyers who provide duty counsel services.