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Special edition: Message to the tariff bar

Annual legal aid funding increased

I am pleased to advise you that the Attorney General, the Honourable Shirley Bond, has announced a significant funding increase for legal aid.

In a December 30 statement, the Attorney General said LSS would be receiving an additional \$2.1 million beginning in 2012/2013 to support our family law and CFCSA services.

This is the first funding increase for our family law programs since 2005 and will ensure we are able to maintain current levels of service. These programs are particularly important because they focus on achieving early and stable resolutions often without going to court.

We advised the Ministry of Attorney General in June 2011 that family and CFCSA case costs had risen significantly over the past few years. LSS conducted a very detailed analysis of the reasons for the cost increase and found that it was largely the result of factors outside of our control such as court backlogs, the increased use of alternative dispute resolution alongside traditional court processes, and the higher costs associated with providing services in rural and remote communities.

While the funding increase is great news, our research demonstrates that one of the keys to developing a sustainable legal aid program is a justice system that provides fast, inexpensive solutions to legal problems. Everyone benefits when less time and money is spent on process and more is spent on resolution.

Throughout 2012, LSS will be urging justice system stakeholders to work with us on initiatives to simplify our courts, to promote early intervention and dispute resolution, and to improve access to justice in BC. If we can reduce the cost of delivering justice, more money will be available for those who need legal aid the most.

I offer you all best wishes for the new year and, as always, I welcome your comments at lawyersresources@lss.bc.ca.

Mark Benton, QC
Executive Director

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