

Legal Aid BC Update

From the desk of Mark Benton, QC
Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Society



Meeting with the Attorney General

LSS Board Chair Tom Christensen and I met with Attorney General Suzanne Anton, QC, and Deputy Attorney General Richard Fyfe, QC, in Vancouver in December. The conversation identified mutual concerns that both the ministry and LSS want to resolve. We discussed LSS concerns about budget pressures; in particular, the rising cost of child protection cases and the difficulties of serving the needs of family law clients. The AG was sympathetic to our concerns about how to provide services with limited funds.

The meeting confirmed the Minister is committed to working with LSS on key justice issues that affect British Columbians. She wanted to hear our ideas regarding how to better serve Aboriginal peoples. This is a shared strategic priority that could open the door to working with other ministries, and exploring the possibilities of federal funding.

New LSS board member

Dinyar Marzban, QC, is the newest member of the LSS Board of Directors, replacing Deanna Ludowicz, whose term ended in December. Dinyar has practiced in the areas of family law, civil litigation, and mediation. He was called to the BC bar in 1982, and appointed Queen's Counsel in 2004.



As a senior family law practitioner, Dinyar is acutely aware of the need to reform family law in BC. He was a member of the Family Justice Reform Working Group for the Justice Review Task Force established in 2002, along with Heidi Mason, LSS director of Legal Advice and Representation.

Dinyar sees an opportunity for LSS to promote justice system reform and increase access to justice, particularly in the area of family law. He brings to the board a strong desire to reduce the complexity of the justice system, and in doing so increase access to justice for low income people in BC.

Dinyar is one of four board members that are appointed by the Law Society of BC after consultation with the BC branch of the Canadian Bar Association. The BC government appoints the other 5 members.

Mediation referral project launched

A new legal aid project was recently launched that provides free mediation services for BC families facing property, debt, spousal support or child-related issues.

Low-income people who qualify financially for legal aid but whose legal issue is not covered by LSS will be referred to the Mediate BC Society for six hours of family mediation services. These services will be provided by mediators face to face, by telephone, or by web conferencing. If the dispute is not resolved after six hours of mediation, further mediation services will be offered at a sliding scale based on the parties' income and assets.

Mediation Referral is one of five projects LSS has launched or is about to launch with increased funding from the Ministry of Justice.

For more, see the news release and project FAQ on the [LSS website](#).

LSS staff lawyer contributes to family law reform in BC

LSS staff lawyer Rosanna Slipperjack-Farrell is taking part in a Ministry of Justice working group that will transform the Provincial Court Family Rules in BC. She will represent LSS on the committee, which is composed of provincial court judges, policy makers, and other lawyers.

One of the ways we contribute to making justice work better in BC is by using the knowledge we have within LSS to assist other parts of the justice system improve their part in access to justice. I am pleased and proud that the knowledge and experience that Rosanna has gained through serving low income people in the North will be available to the AG, the Chief Judge and the other committed professionals who are working to make the Family Court rules better for everyone.

The Provincial Court Family Rules project will update the family court process, rules and forms to embrace the vision and direction described in **Access to Civil and Family Justice: A Roadmap for Change**. In particular, the project aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the court process for people who take their legal issues to family court, and to reflect that process in court rules and forms that are easy for the public to understand and use.

Rosanna has been a staff lawyer in the Terrace office since 2012. She practices in the areas of family, child protection and criminal law, and appears in various Provincial Courts in the Northwest, including Smithers, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert. Rosanna is Ojibwe and a registered member of the Eabametoong First Nation

LSS partners with Hiil to create MyLawBC website

LSS is partnering with **Hiil** — an advisory and research institute for the justice sector, based in the Hague — to create the MyLawBC interactive website. What's innovative about the site are the online tools British Columbians will be able to access to resolve their legal issues, including guided pathways that diagnose legal problems through a series of questions and answers, and then directs users to self-help resources, both online and in person. In addition, people experiencing a relationship breakdown can get action plans and online negotiation tools to help them make a separation agreement. The tools are based on the much acclaimed **Rechtwijzer platform** that Hiil developed in partnership with the Dutch Legal Aid Board.



MyLawBC will be launched in June 2015. The site content will cover family law, family violence, wills/estates and life planning and foreclosure.

For general information about the society, see [Legal Aid Today](#).



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