



Legal
Services
Society

Providing legal aid
in British Columbia
since 1979

Message to the tariff bar

A look back at 2010

As we approach the end of 2010, I want to thank all of you for your continued dedication to legal aid. This was a difficult year for the Legal Services Society — rising costs and increasing demand forced us to close regional centres so that we could put more money into services — but it was not without its accomplishments.

The simplified tariffs, for instance, were an excellent example of collaboration between lawyers and LSS to make billing easier. Our average processing time for your accounts is now less than six days. Also important was the reintroduction of coverage for administrative offences and the new Family LawLINE telephone advice program. Many lawyers told us these services will make a real difference in their clients' lives.

In August, 500 Tamils arrived in BC, nearly doubling in a single day the number of refugees we expected for the entire year. The immigration bar, along with LSS staff, worked day and night to help these people, and I applaud their efforts. We were also able to negotiate additional funding from the federal government to help cover the unexpected costs.

LSS made a number of improvements to family services, including advice lawyers at six new Family Justice Centres; additional hours for duty counsel at high-demand locations; five new lead duty counsel; lawyers at two community clinics for women with drug and alcohol problems; a commitment to duty counsel in Haida Gwaii; the reinstatement of extended services; and updates to the Family Law in British Columbia website (www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca).

For criminal law, we finalized an agreement with the provincial government, ensuring the cost of large criminal cases does not deplete funding for other services; we returned tiered rates for criminal duty counsel; and we launched a program that trains people to write Gladue reports for Aboriginal offenders.

The LSS community engagement program expanded, with an emphasis on outreach to Aboriginal and remote communities. We consulted with community groups in Kamloops and Prince George and we had workshops for Aboriginal communities throughout BC.

These are just the highlights in what has been a year of restructuring and rebuilding. LSS is not yet providing all the services we feel are necessary to serve our clients, nor are we able to pay our lawyers what they deserve, but we are restoring services and adding new ones.

I offer you all my warmest thanks and, as always, I welcome your comments at lawyersresources@lss.bc.ca.

Mark Benton, QC
Executive Director

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