



Changes to operations in 2010

By now you will have heard that the Legal Services Society is changing its operations in five communities next year. The following will provide you with specific information about those changes.

Effective April 1, 2010, the society will replace its regional centres in Kamloops, Prince George, Kelowna, Surrey, and Victoria with local agents and an expanded, province-wide call centre. Twenty-two communities around the province are already served by local agents and it has proven to be an effective service delivery model.

The reason for these changes is to reduce the society's operating costs so LSS can balance its budget and put more money into core services in family law, child protection, immigration law, and criminal law. The changes are part of a long-term strategy to focus spending on services rather than infrastructure and to reshape LSS into an organization that is better able to respond to fluctuations in demand and revenues. This strategy began earlier in the year, when LSS announced service and staffing reductions, and will continue through next year with a review of the Vancouver Regional Centre's infrastructure and costs to determine whether additional savings can be achieved for the 2011/2012 budget.

Regarding the society's funding, in 2009/2010, the government allocated an additional \$2 million for the Exceptional Case Fund (major criminal trials), but that allocation will not be available in 2010/2011. Nor will LSS have any future deficit authorization which means it must have a balanced budget each year. The society's non-government revenues from the Notary Foundation and its own investments continue to decline because of low interest rates. Funding from the Law Foundation has been confirmed for the 2010/2011 fiscal year.

Although there are no changes to the core services mentioned above, LSS will be discontinuing civil law advice programs that are offered by telephone (LawLINE and the Community Advocate Support Line) and those offered in partnership with the Ministry of Attorney General at the Nanaimo Justice Access Centre (with the exception of the Aboriginal community legal worker position). Those services will end March 26, 2010. All Ministry of Attorney General services at the Nanaimo Justice Access Centre will remain. Civil advice programs have been operating on a year-to-year basis and the society has been unable to secure ongoing funding.



The Terrace Regional Centre will remain open as part of a program to improve services to Aboriginal British Columbians who have historically experienced additional barriers to accessing the justice system.

Changes such as these are not without their consequences, the most serious of which is the reduction of 58 positions at the society. Our regional centre staff have all provided excellent service to our low-income clients for many years and the loss of their knowledge, skills, and commitment cannot be underestimated. However, we see these changes as needed to sustain and improve the broad range of information, advice, and representation services we offer to individual British Columbians.

It is important that you have accurate information about LSS services. If you have questions that are not answered by our website (www.lss.bc.ca), please contact the society directly.

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