

Legal Aid BC Update

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



Legal Services Society budget update

Yesterday, the Legal Services Society (LSS) sent out a budget update to lawyers who do legal aid. In the interests of sharing this information with justice system stakeholders, I am passing it along to you in its entirety.

Dear Colleagues,

The Legal Services Society has now received formal confirmation of its budget from Attorney General David Eby, QC. You can read the budget approval letter [here](#).

As noted in my message of February 21st, LSS is receiving new funding of \$12 million to improve core services and to expand the Parents Legal Centre program (currently in Vancouver and Surrey) to more locations throughout the province as recommended by Grand Chief Ed John in his report on Aboriginal child welfare.

In his letter, the Attorney General notes that while compensation for legal aid lawyers continues to be a concern, he cannot approve a tariff rate increase at this time. The LSS board remains committed to securing funding for a tariff increase and will continue to discuss this issue with the Attorney General.

The Attorney General has asked LSS to earmark \$1 million for an incentive-based compensation plan that will be subject to his approval. LSS is considering using some of this money for incentives that will attract lawyers to legal aid work in communities where it is difficult to place cases with local counsel. We will provide more information about the incentive plan once the Attorney General has approved it.

Because this is the most significant funding increase since 2002, most of the money will be used to improve existing services rather than establish new programs.

Over the course of the 2018/19 fiscal year, you will receive formal notice of a number of tariff and policy changes. In the coming weeks, you can expect to receive information about an increase in the preparation hours for family law cases, new tariff items for representing Indigenous clients in criminal cases and reinstatement of family law exception reviews and extended services.

The LSS board presented the Attorney General with three priorities when his ministry was preparing the 2018/19 budget: family law, Indigenous services and tariff increases. We were successful in securing a significant funding increase – the largest since 2002 – for the first two priorities, but not for a tariff increase. I recognize that this means considerable disappointment for everyone who takes legal aid referrals. I want to assure you that a tariff increase will continue to be a priority and that the LSS Board of Directors and staff will continue to raise this with the Attorney General and his staff.

Thank you all for your continuing commitment to providing legal services to those most in need.

Mark

Mark Benton, QC
CEO, Legal Services Society



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