

WESTERN CANADA SOCIETY TO ACCESS JUSTICE

A Non-Profit Charitable Society (Reg. # 87068 4123 RR0001)

October 16, 2009

Dear Friends of Access Justice

Financial and Operational Update

When we last messaged all of you in March of this year we were facing severe financial challenges particularly as a result of the anticipated loss of an annual grant from the BC Ministry of the Attorney General. As a result, we made significant adjustments to our staffing costs by way of reduction of FTE levels and attrition. A few weeks ago, we finally received formal confirmation that the Attorney General grant will not be paid this year and accordingly we will need to continue at reduced staffing levels.

At the same time, it has been gratifying that financial donations from the bar have continued roughly at last year's levels. We are most grateful for this support particularly in these difficult financials times. As always, we appreciate whatever amount can be given to help us to continue our clinic work.

Despite these financial challenges, our clinic work continues to grow. We anticipate adding 2 to 3 new clinics this fall, and our client bookings are up 19% over last year's levels. This increase in service is a strong testimony to the growing legal needs of the public in BC – it is also a strong testimony to the ongoing commitment of the profession to pro bono services.

Other Developments

For the past two years, we have been moving towards closer operational alignment with Pro Bono Law of BC and the Salvation Army's Pro Bono Program. In October 2008 the Access Justice Board resolved to seek a merger with Pro Bono Law of BC. In March 2009 the two organizations received a grant from the Law Foundation to provide capital costs for a merger. In June 2009 the Law Foundation announced a further grant for operating costs for a merged organization for the fiscal years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. Both the AJ board and the PBLBC board have now formally resolved to create a fully merged entity by March 2010. It is expected we will co-locate to joint office space by December 2009 and will finalize governance and staffing issues by March 2010. A joint Transition Committee is well under way to deal with the wide range of merger details.

The two boards view this merger as a very positive step to advancing the delivery of pro bono legal services in BC. Each organization brings unique strengths to the relationship, and the various programs run by each organization strongly complement each other. The merger will bring various operational efficiencies which will allow us to enhance these existing programs and which will eventually allow us to consider new programs.

At the same time, we anticipate that the grant commitment from the Law Foundation will only cover approximately two thirds of the projected yearly budget for the combined organization. We will need to continue to rely on additional funding sources and we will need to look to the bar to for the ongoing financial support that has been so generously given in the past. Please check our website periodically for additional information updates and, as always, feel free to contact us with your questions or comments.

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