



For Immediate Release: 25 February 2002

Legal Services Society Directed to Implement Legal Aid Cuts

Vancouver, BC – The Legal Services Society (LSS) today announced that government appointed trustee Jane Morley, QC, has directed the Society to implement a budget based on the government's previously announced cuts to legal aid.

The budget requires the Society to begin phasing out legal services for as many as 40,000 people and to replace existing offices with a new service delivery structure, eliminating about 74% of staff positions.

Effective immediately the Society will begin restructuring the organization. By this September, all 60 offices operated or funded by LSS will be replaced with a new service delivery model consisting of 7 regional centres, a province-wide call centre, and 24 local agents.

Starting April 1, the Society will begin phasing out the following services, which will affect as many as 40,000 clients:

- legal representation for all family cases where violence is not involved,
- legal representation for all poverty law cases, and
- all summary advice services.

Effective April 1, LSS will:

- remove the current tariff holdbacks and reduce all tariffs by 10%,
- eliminate public legal education grants to local organizations for community development and public legal education projects, and
- eliminate grants and other support to public libraries.

Once all the cuts are in place, services will have been pared back to little more than legal representation where it is required by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the courts — adult criminal matters where conviction is likely to result in imprisonment, Young Offenders Act matters, mental health reviews, child protection matters, and immigration/refugee cases. There also will be emergency representation for family matters involving domestic violence.

Public legal education and information (PLEI) will consist primarily of electronic services such as the LSS website, a new version of the Law Line, some print materials, and some community advocate training. Poverty law services will be limited to PLEI.

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization, created by statute. Its current mandate is to foster public legal education and provide effective legal services to low income BC residents, particularly those people experiencing legal problems that threaten their liberty, security, and livelihood.

In 2000 – 2001, the Society helped about one-quarter of a million people with legal representation, summary advice, and legal information.

LSS services are provided by staff in 60 offices operated or funded by the Society and by more than 1,300 private bar lawyers who take legal aid referrals.



Still to be determined is whether the Society can continue several other programs that affect more than 30,000 clients beyond September. These include out-of-custody duty counsel services and continued coverage of existing referrals for family cases not resolved by September. However, the trustee decided the Society will continue Brydges Line services, which receives about 30,000 calls a year.

The provincial government in January announced cuts to legal aid amounting to 38.8% over three years — from \$88.3 million in 2001/2002 to just under \$54 million in 2004/2005. It restricted what it is prepared to fund, and instructed the Society to absorb significant new costs. The government also said it will amend the LSS Act in the spring sitting of the legislature to allow for the necessary service changes.

The LSS Board of Directors twice refused to implement the cuts, saying it could not in good conscience dismantle legal aid in BC. Attorney General Geoff Plant, QC, last week appointed Ms. Morley as official trustee to replace the board.

For further information, please check our website: <http://www.lss.bc.ca> and contact:

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