

March 18, 2002

The Honourable Martin Cauchon, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Justice and Attorney
General of Canada
284 Wellington Street
Ottawa Ontario
K1A 0H8

Dear Minister:

We write to express the Canadian Bar Association's (CBA) support for the Aboriginal Justice Strategy (AJS). The AJS, of which the Aboriginal Justice Learning Network (AJLN) is a part, was to sunset on March 31, 2001. Throughout their five-year mandate (1996-2001), the AJS and the AJLN have assisted more than 300 Aboriginal communities across Canada to explore community-based justice initiatives and to implement their own visions of relationships, not only between the federal government and Aboriginal communities, but also among communities, government agencies of all levels and justice stakeholders across the country.

The AJS was renewed for one year (April 2001-March 2002) at existing funding levels and is currently preparing for long-term renewal of its mandate. Through the renewal process, the AJS proposes to further the work it has begun. That work has three prongs: (1) supporting the creation of justice projects in Aboriginal communities, (2) forming the AJLN, and (3) a Justice Jurisdiction initiative. The AJS has gone a long way in addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the mainstream justice system.

The CBA is in favour of the renewal of the AJS. We urge that this renewal continue for at least 10 years and that levels of funding be increased.

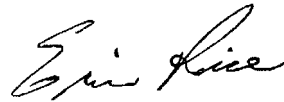
The AJLN has accomplished much in educating mainstream justice personnel about the realities of Aboriginal culture and its relevance in judging, sentencing and rehabilitation of Aboriginal offenders. The AJLN has achieved this in spite of being understaffed and having its budget cut each year. Further, it has increased the percentage of its budget going directly to the community from 72% to 84%, unheard of in most government departments. The Aboriginal Justice Directorate funds over 280 programs across the country, but has many other proposals from various communities that it simply cannot entertain for lack of resources.

Considering the funds allocated to related initiatives within the Department of Justice, such as the National Crime Prevention Council, Youth Justice and Victims' Services, in conjunction with the pressing needs of Aboriginal people in all of these and other areas, we should maintain the current momentum by renewing and expanding the AJS.

In addition, we note the growing enthusiasm at the community level to the ideas of restorative justice, something that requires immediate encouragement through adequate government funding.

We thank you for seriously considering this issue. The executive members of the CBA's Aboriginal Law Section would be pleased to discuss the matter with you further at your convenience.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Rice". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "R".

Linda Locke
Chair - Aboriginal Law Section

Eric Rice, Q.C.
President

cc. Clare Beckton - Assistant Deputy Attorney General
Daniel Watson - Indian & Northern Affairs Canada