



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
CABINET DU PRÉSIDENT

July 12, 2004

Minister Geoff Plant
Attorney General
The Government of British Columbia
PO Box 9044
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Plant,

I write on behalf of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA), a national association representing over 38,000 lawyers, notaries, law teachers and students across the country, concerning recent cuts to the funding of immigration and refugee legal aid services in British Columbia.

The CBA's mandate includes advancing the interests of the profession, and seeking improvements in the law and the administration of justice. These aspects of our mandate are the basis for our concerns about legal aid as essential for meaningful access to justice. We believe that a country that prides itself on a commitment to fairness and justice must ensure that all people can actually rely on the protections offered by our laws. We also believe that lawyers must be fairly remunerated for the professional services that they provide.

British Columbia is the third largest refugee-receiving province in Canada. Cutting legal aid funding puts refugees at risk, increases the time it takes to process refugee claims and shifts the financial burden to other social assistance programs. This not only results in unfairness to the people involved, it increases costs to both federal and provincial governments. Any dispute between governments as to which should bear responsibility for immigration and refugee legal aid services does not excuse a failure to meet Canada's international and moral commitments to justice and fairness in processing refugee claims.

The CBA urges your government to commit ongoing funding to provide adequate coverage for important immigration and refugee matters. The CBA has continuously and vigorously lobbied the federal government to ensure adequate civil legal aid coverage across the country, wherever critical interests are involved. Given the interests at stake in many refugee cases and the inability

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of most refugee claimants to adequately represent themselves, publicly funded legal representation is absolutely essential for a fair process. We believe that all government leaders must assume responsibility for meaningful access to justice.

Thank you for considering the views of the Canadian Bar Association.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. William Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

F. William Johnson, Q.C.

cc: The Hon. Irwin Cotler, P.C., M.P. / Minister of Justice
The Hon. Judy Sgro, P.C., M.P. / Minister of Citizenship and Immigration