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October 20, 2022

Via Email

Benchers of the Law Society of Ontario

**Re: LIRN Funding**

Dear Madams and Sirs:

I am writing to you to express my concerns regarding the upcoming vote at convocation regarding LIRN's funding. Law libraries provide critical resources and provide vital support to lawyers in private practice, however these functions are of critical importance for smaller centres. In the Central South region, specifically in Welland and Lincoln County the vast majority of law firms are solos or small firms. These firms simply cannot afford the same resources that larger firms can. These smaller firms also service a disproportionate number of disadvantaged clients. I have been practicing for 14 years and maintain a large volume of legally aided clients. These clients matters are no less deserving of access to legal services than are those who can privately retain a lawyer. Further, smaller firms simply cannot afford the expense of services provided by Thomson Reuters, LexisNexis and vLex alone.

Local libraries are essential and are relied upon almost daily by many lawyers. I know that I use our library's services each and every time I am in court, which at times, is daily. Our librarian provides critical research support to my practice to which I would otherwise not have access. Properly funded local libraries means that lawyers across Ontario have equal access to all available legal resources. Lawyers are able to keep current on the law and are able to access resources that would otherwise be financially unattainable.

Navigating legal resources can be overwhelming and this is why it is essential that our librarians be paid properly. Quite simply, many lawyers, including myself would be unable to provide the level of service we do if we were not able to rely upon Ms. Petsche (our librarian) to assist with research. The Law Society's mandate is to ensure that the public is served by lawyers and paraegals

with the highest standards of learning and competence and cutting funding to our law libraries is the best way to ensure a lower standard. Cutting library funding directly contradicts the LSO's mandate of ensuring competence.

Libraries act as a hub for interactions between lawyers, which allows lawyers to form relationships with each other and for mentor/mentee relationships to be formed. I met my mentor, the late James Stengel at our library and our librarian, Ms. Petsche introduced us. Over the years, I have been involved in planning and have attended numerous CPD programs offered by our local association. None of these would be possible without the resources provided to us through the library. None of our firms have professional development departments, nor do we have firm libraries, nor do we bill in excess of \$800 per hour. The reality of small law firms is that we are dependent upon our librarians to provide us with what large firms simply have access to. Again, small firms and associations also service a larger portion of economically disadvantaged clients, and we often do a great deal of work which goes unpaid.

I am thankful that the Law Society is not considering reducing our library budget, however this was decreased far too much over the pandemic and we require an increase beyond pre-pandemic levels. I am writing to you in the hopes that I can convince you to vote in support of local libraries, as in my opinion, it is the only way to ensure access to justice for all Ontarians.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ashley Gibson".

GIBSON & REITBOECK LLP

Per: Ashley Gibson