



2020-2021
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December 18, 2020

Law Society of Ontario East Region Benchers

VIA EMAIL

Dear Cheryl, Cecil, and Jean-Jacques,

We, the Presidents of the Law Associations in the region you represent as Benchers, are writing you directly in relation to the announced cuts to our budgets for the 2021 year, proposed by the LSO, approved by the Benchers, and passed through to us by LIRN. We are also writing to you about the 2022 budgeting process.

One of our associations, the County of Carleton Law Association, has already released a statement (copy attached), expressing its dismay at the cuts.

This dismay is shared by all of us, as the Presidents of East Region law associations, volunteering our time to support the operation of associations which are vital to the profession in each of the counties and districts we represent.

We cannot express enough how vital our libraries and the related associations are to our members. To name just a few of the ways in which they are essential to our profession and the Law Society of Ontario's spoken goals of access to justice, competence of lawyers, and the mental health of members of our profession:

1. Libraries provide legal research resources for members which are so often unavailable otherwise, particularly those members who are sole practitioners or members of small firms that cannot afford those resources within their firm. These services can be in person but are also available online. This resource is exceedingly important in ensuring the continued competence of our members.
2. Libraries provide access to professional librarian support for some of the more challenging legal issues that our members can face from time to time in the course of their practices – again, improving the competence of our members.
3. Libraries provide a basis for collegiality, allowing members to connect, both physically in the library space itself, as well as outside the physical bounds of that space. This collegiality is vital for:
 - a. Mentorship for younger lawyers;
 - b. CPD organized through the associations for presentation amongst members of the association, and other practicing lawyers not members of our associations but nevertheless taking part in those offered programs;
 - c. Collaboration amongst members to solve file-specific issues, practice-related problems, no more evident than with the onset of the recent COVID pandemic.
 - d. Dissemination of key communications...Our associations have been key in disseminating to our members key communications from LSO, AG, and other stakeholders in the justice system in response to the pandemic.
 - e. Mutual support in times of stress, again, most recently demonstrated with the arrival of the pandemic. The [issue of the] mental health of

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our members is a crucial issue as the LSO has repeatedly stated. Shared experiences, shared solutions to stressful practice circumstances, shared information about available resources – all available from our associations, contribute in an immeasurable way to the reduction of stress and the improvement of the mental health of our members.

4. Many of our libraries provide access to resources for members of the public, in particular self-represented litigants. Access to justice is a key mandate of the Law Society of Ontario, and access to library resources for self-represented parties supports this mandate in a crucial way.
5. Libraries provide legal resources for our judiciary, which contributes to the competence of our judiciary, another key component of a healthy justice system.
6. Libraries provide a forum for the bench and bar to communicate with each other openly about problems, and solutions to those problems, whether those problems come from the bench or the bar, again improving access to justice for the public.

Given the rapidly changing economic, social, and technological environment in which our members are practicing, the role of our associations has become even more critical in supporting our members through these times of disruptive change. Through our associations, we are able to support our members in dealing with the social, economic, and legal fallout from this changing environment.

Over the last number of years, our budgets have seen increases limited to 2% per year. Those increases have fallen significantly behind cost increases for essential legal resources needed for each library's collection. Many of our associations have found it necessary to subsidize collection costs in order to stay current and relevant for their members. In some cases, increased costs have left some smaller associations having to 'pick and choose' amongst vital resources, leaving their libraries short, and unable to service members needing quick research on issues arising in the middle of Court proceedings or other vital emergency circumstances. Library staff in many associations are working at salaries well below average salaries for fellow professionals elsewhere in the library world. In short, budgets of our associations have already been strained by the lack of significant increases to match the increase in collection costs. The additional cuts for 2021 are devastating.

We hope and trust that each of you understands and supports the work that our associations do for the benefit of our members, and that your work towards the 2022 budget will include the support of a reinstatement of our pre-2021 budget, with plans for increases to support the increased collection costs. We are happy to educate you and your fellow benchers as to our value to the profession, our role in fulfilling the mandate of the LSO, and the vital need for our funding to be reinstated, and increased, to allow the great work that we do to continue. We consider ourselves to be a critical partner in facilitating access to justice and want to be part of the engagement process in relation to the development of LSO's 2022 budget.

We look forward to hearing from you as to how we can help to ensure that this happens.

Sincerely,

Ted Mann
East Region Chair



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