



FOLA LOBBY DAY 2020 RECAP

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On February 20th, 2020, approximately 60 lawyers from Law Associations across Ontario descended upon Queen's Park for a full day of meetings and events as part of FOLA's Inaugural Lobby Day.

Following some networking over breakfast, Law Association members received a recap of key issues and listened to a session on Lobbying/Advocacy 101 with former Premier Wynne staffer and current Fasken lawyer Lindsay Aagaard before heading in to watch Question Period. Special thanks to Lindsay Park, MPP (Durham) and Parliamentary Assistant to the Attorney General for recognizing FOLA's attendance in the gallery from the floor of the Legislative Assembly!

Following Question Period (and a brief stop for a group photo on Grand Staircase in the Main Legislative Building) members attended a packed FOLA Lobby Day luncheon reception for all MPPs and staff where both the Honorable Doug Downey, MPP (Barrie—Springwater—Orillia) and Ontario's Attorney General, and Gurratan Singh, MPP (Brampton East) and the NDP critic for the Attorney General said a few words.

At 1:30, individual members began breaking out into groups and headed off to meetings with individual MPPs, Cabinet Ministers, and Ministers' staff followed by a round table style debrief session. In all, 26 separate meetings were held regarding issues of concern and interest to members. Here's a quick recap of some of the key meetings:

LEGAL AID

FOLA's Legal Aid Committee Chair, Terry Brandon, led a meeting in the Attorney General's office where members discussed the affects of the recent cuts to legal aid funding, proposed changes to the Legal Aid Services Act, the importance of the role of the private bar in legal aid services, and the impacts unique to student and community clinics.

FAMILY LAW

Sam Misheal, FOLA's Family Law Committee Chair, led a meeting in the AG's office to discuss, among other issues, proposed changes to the Divorce Act.

REAL ESTATE LAW

Real Estate Co-Chairs Merredith MacLennan and Eldon Horner led a meeting, also in the AG's office, to discuss a host of issues affecting the real estate bar including proposed changes to the Commissioners for Taking Affidavits Act as proposed in Bill 161 (the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act 2019).

They also took time to stress the important role many real estate lawyers play as the “go-to” lawyer in communities as many people refer to these lawyers as “their lawyer” who is called on to direct their clients to government or other resources and/or to experts in a particular field.

Eldon and Merredith also headed up a meeting with Minister’s staff in Municipal Affairs and Housing to reiterate their support of the changes proposed to the Planning Act through the former Private Member’s bill of the same name.

COURTHOUSE ISSUES

FOLA’s fourth meeting in the AG’s office was led by FOLA Board Member Kirstin Muszynski to discuss issues such as staffing and modernization in Ontario’s courthouses – issues affecting each and every member of the practicing bar!

Also around courthouse issues was a meeting with the local MPP for Brantford-Brant. Attended by our large delegation from the Brant Law Association, this meeting was arranged specifically to discuss plans for a new courthouse. Through some follow up, FOLA has learned that the MPP (Will Bouma, also the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier) has discussed the process for moving forward with this with both the AG and the President of the Treasury Board about how to move forward with an RFP process!

CRIMINAL LAW

FOLA organized two meetings for our criminal lawyers, both of which were led by FOLA Board Member Nathan Baker. The first was a meeting with policy staff in the Minister of Transportation’s office for a discussion on ignition interlock and remedial measures programs to encourage more resolution of impaired driving matters without the need for a trial.

The second meeting was with the Chief of Staff for Ontario’s Solicitor General to discuss the implementation of bail provisions with police vis-à-vis Bill C-75; the use of video tech to avoid/reduce transportation of prisoners; ongoing issues around overcrowding in Ontario jails; and other facility issues.

AUTO INSURANCE

As with every government in Ontario’s recent history, this government is proposing amendments to auto insurance through the “Putting Drivers First:” blueprint. Led by Michael Winward, FOLA’s Chair and Co-Chair of our Auto Insurance Committee, FOLA had a meeting with staff in the Minister of Finance’s office as well as with the NDP Auto Insurance Critic to discuss concerns with the “Care, Not Cash default” proposal and offer support for raising the catastrophic impairment default benefit limit.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice was also a key aspect of meetings and, as such, meetings with other Minister’s staff included a meeting with staff in Minister Todd Smith’s office (Minister of Children, Community and Social Services) to discuss the severe lack of mental health resources and with staff in Minister Lisa Thompson’s office (Minister of Government and Consumer Services) to discuss a proposed ID fee waiver for low income (or no income) clients.

FOLA is told that Minister Smith’s office will be following up on this issue with Minister Michael Tibollo’s office (Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions) and special kudos to Minister Thompson’s office for already following up with our delegation! Conversations around the ID fee waivers continues!

NORTHERN ISSUES

Because our northern members often raise issues unique to Ontario's north, we arranged for meetings with both the Associate Minister for Northern Affairs and the Director of Policy for the Minister of Northern Affairs as well as the NDP Critic for Northern Affairs. Issues discussed included a request for legislation that would ensure a permanent judicial appointment in currently underserved areas; the effects legal aid funding cuts have had on northern legal aid clinics; ID fee waivers (especially for those in Ontario's Indigenous communities); and lack of reliable internet.

Thanks to Associate Minister Walker for offering to continue these conversations in his constituency office in Owen Sound!

SPECIAL FOLA TOWN HALL WITH THE NDP'S ATTORNEY GENERAL CRITIC

Because so many meetings were held with staff in the AG's office, we decided to host a large town hall style meeting with Gurratan Singh, the NDP's AG Critic. A very well attended meeting, Mr. Singh shared his concerns with this government and heard from our members on a host of issues including elder care, legal aid, the role of duty counsel, access to mental health beds, and judicial appointments. He was also encouraged to support Planning Act amendments when (or if) they are brought forward again. Mr. Singh was extremely engaged and offered to continue discussions with FOLA through future (and hopefully regular) meetings.

In addition to the above meetings, many lobby day attendees had meetings with their own MPP to discuss justice issues unique to their city, town, county and/or region.

MEDIA

There were calls and visits from Queen's Park Briefing (QP Briefing), CBC-Radio Canada (French), and the Huffington Post. Vicky Ringuette from Haldimand Law Association saved the day and did a live interview with Radio-Canada at around 5pm. Terry Brandon, Mike Winward, and Merredith MacLennan spoke with QP Briefing. And Terry and Bill Woodward spoke with the Huffington Post.

WHAT COMES NEXT

To all those who attended, please be sure to thank and follow up with everyone you met with. FOLA will, of course, be doing the same, but it does mean more coming from you directly. And FOLA's Board will be reviewing the event at our March Board meeting. Stay tuned to learn if this will become a regular (annual?) event!

PHOTOS!

Photos are now available on our [website](#)! If you see yourself or someone you know and they have not been tagged, please let us know!

