

**Rainy River District Law Association
Kenora District Law Association
Thunder Bay Law Association**
c/o P.O. Box 105, Fort Frances, ON, P9A 3M5

January 8, 2021

Benchers
Law Society of Ontario
Osgoode Hall
130 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N6

Via Email: lawsociety@lso.ca and various others

Dear Benchers:

Re: LIRN Budget Cuts

We write on behalf of the three district law associations serving Northwestern Ontario to express our concerns about the recent announcement of cuts to the annual funding granted to law libraries by LIRN.

As with other regions of the province, law libraries in the Northwest provide a vital resource to the practicing bar and the public. In our region, counsel routinely appear in courts hundreds of kilometres from their offices and rely heavily on the availability of law library facilities and services in order to provide adequate service.

In rural and northern communities, the role of the law library is essential to the practicing bar and our ability to adequately represent clients and assist the court in an efficient, competent, and cost-effective manner. In our region, most licensees are practicing in small firms or sole practices and cannot economically maintain expensive database and loose-leaf subscriptions nor frequent the Great Library in Toronto to access materials.

While larger libraries have been targeted for the largest cuts, smaller libraries (such as those in Fort Frances and Kenora) rely heavily on larger libraries (such as that in Thunder Bay) for timely access to material. As such, as smaller libraries look to implement modest cuts to their collections, they will become more reliant on larger regional libraries, which are subject to much more severe cuts.

Outside of larger centres, law libraries also play a crucial role in maintaining access to legal services and sustaining a vibrant local bar. Our law libraries help new lawyers access resources in the early days of their practices, they facilitate mentorship, and they support lawyer competence and professional development. This is an essential service for licensees who practice in locations where they do not have the same access to other resources, other proximate lawyer associations, or in-person learning opportunities.

In raising these concerns, we recognize that the pandemic has ushered in a period of transformation and challenge for the entire legal system – including LIRN and the Law Society. We appreciate that the LIRN board is working hard to implement a modern vision of library services under these constraints.

That said, we strongly urge Benchers to take into account the unique regional needs of the Ontario bar and the crucial role that law libraries play in supporting licensees in sole practice or small firms. Properly-resourced law libraries are of increased importance for facilitating access to justice and legal services in rural and northern communities. We call on the Law Society to restore funding to law libraries to previous levels after the pandemic subsides.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns. Should you have any questions, or should you wish to discuss this matter further, our email addresses are noted below our signatures.

Sincerely,

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C. Federation of Ontario Law Associations, *Via Email: katie.robinette@fola.ca*