



NORTHWEST REGION REPORT

May 9, 2021

The Northwest Region consists of the Thunder Bay Law Association, the Kenora District Law Association, and the Rainy River District Law Association.

As with other regions of the province and the wider justice sector, our region's bar has been rapidly adapting to the constraints of COVID-19 and the brave new world it has ushered into our practices. We have done so under some unique local constraints, including a fire in the Thunder Bay Courthouse, which resulted in water damage and required the city's courts to seek other accommodations, as well as the unique challenges the pandemic has created for remote and fly-in court locations.

As representative for the region, I have been in regular contact with the leadership of our associations to coordinate our response to various regional and provincial issues facing our members. Of late, these efforts have been directed toward the following concerns:

- In October, we raised concerns to Legal Aid Ontario about the unique regional challenges created by a change in policy which prevents Duty Counsel from speaking to agency adjournments, regardless of the client's certificate status.
- In January, our associations sent a joint letter to the Benchers of the Law Society of Ontario expressing our concerns about proposed cuts to LiRN which would impact our local law library budgets.
- In April, we confirmed the local priority for COVID-19 vaccination for members of the private bar who appear in court and their staff.
- We are in the process of engaging with regional court staff and judicial officials about (i) concerns which have been raised about the increasing delays experienced by counsel when requests are submitted to Court Services, and (ii) to address inconsistencies with provincial case management courts held over Zoom.
- Some members of the bar have raised concerns about anonymity related to court procedures. These specifically relate to (i) the growing practice of court clerks and judges to insist that virtual courtroom attendees identify themselves, and (ii) the problematic notation of section 517 publication bans on the docket for criminal proceedings. We continue to monitor these issues and to collect input from stakeholders.

Finally, it is with continuing disappointment that the Rainy River District remains the only base court in the province without a local provincial court judge. While remote sittings would presumably have mitigated this issue, it has exacerbated delays getting paperwork processed by the court as judges are now even less frequently visiting our court. The Rainy River District Law Association is currently awaiting a decision from the Information and Privacy Commissioner about its right of access to records concerning what resources are being expended to ferry judges in and out of Fort Frances instead of basing one at this location.



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On behalf of the Northwest Region’s associations, I want to extend my special thanks to Katie Robinette for her continued support and assistance addressing so many emerging concerns over a challenging year.

Douglas W. Judson
FOLA Northwest Region Representative
President, Rainy River District Law Association