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SPRING 2023 PLENARY REPORT

**NOTE: ALL PRESENTATION DECKS CAN BE FOUND ON OUR PLENARY PAGE [HERE](#) (VIDEOS LINKED SEPARATELY)*

FOLA's Spring 2023 Plenary kicked off in Toronto with our "First-Timers" orientation session where FOLA Chair, Douglas Judson, a few FOLA Board members, and FOLA's Executive Director, Katie Robinette, provided an overview of FOLA, what to expect at the Plenary, and answered a few questions.

With the Law Society's AGM taking place virtually at 5:15pm, FOLA had encouraged all members to login and vote for FOLA's Motion to have the LSO devote more resources to ensuring access to lawyers in under-served communities in the province. Thanks to all those who turned out to vote, our Motion passed 52-9 (with three abstentions)! FOLA even attracted some media coverage on our successful Motion in Law360: "[FOLA motion addressing 'greying of the bar' passes at LSO annual general meeting](#)".

But the real Plenary action started with our Pre-Plenary Wednesday evening dinner featuring Marie Henein, widely recognized as one of the most prominent litigators in Canada. Following a rousing talk where all were called on to defend the profession against increasing attacks on lawyers – especially the defence bar – and politicians in all jurisdictions looking to take away a host of rights as they cater to loud interest groups and respond to various headlines, Marie graciously signed copies of her book "Nothing But the Truth".

From there, most headed to our hospitality suite which was sponsored by [LawPRO](#).

On Thursday, May 11th, we officially kicked off FOLA's Spring 2023 Plenary with Opening Remarks from FOLA's Chair, Douglas Judson who also introduced the FOLA Board and did the Roll Call of the Associations.

Next up was a welcome from the Past President of the Toronto Lawyers Association, Erin O'Donovan, who treated us to some little-known history of FOLA and the TLA.

Erin was followed by FOLA's Executive Director, Katie Robinette, who offered her bi-annual report, and then our Committee Chairs who provided their Committee Reports (Legal Aid, Family Law, and Real Estate Law). You can watch Katie's Presentation [here](#) and our Committee Reports [here](#).

Following a break, we heard from Theresa Leitch, Managing Director of LiRN, and Allen Wynperle, FOLA's Chair of our Practice Resource Centres Committee (PRCC). We were made aware of key dates in the budgeting process, offered reminders of key dates, and were provided with additional information about staffing and human resources issues. You can watch the LiRN session [here](#).

We were then joined by former Law Society of Ontario Treasurer, Teresa Donnelly, who gave an informative presentation on a look at the new Benchers. In addition to providing a window into their backgrounds, she provided some details on the structure of the Law Society, the roles various Committee Chairs play, and offered some high-level timelines on when key decisions get brought to Convocation. Teresa Donnelly's presentation was immediately followed by a joint presentation on "Influencing the Influencers" featuring Teresa Donnelly and Mike Wilson, former Chief of Staff to Hon. Doug Downey, Attorney General for Ontario. Together, they briefed attendees on the leadership structure in both the Law Society and the Ministry of the Attorney General and the roles various Committee members and staff play. Wilson differentiated between the role of the Minister's office versus the bureaucracy and walked us through how they work together while Teresa Donnelly walked us through the role of the Treasurer and how Committee work makes it to Convocation. They both offered ways for FOLA members to provide input and influence decision making. Mike Wilson also touched on the relationship between the Attorney General (and his office) and the Premier (and his office). Mike

Wilson also stressed how important follow up is when dealing with a Minister's office as they often spend entire days meeting various interest groups. Without ongoing follow-up, it can be easy for issues to get sidelined. He also left us with a reminder to come to government with solutions rather than simply problems. To view the recording of "A Look at the New Benchers", visit [here](#) and to view the recording of Influencing the Influencers, please visit [here](#).

Following lunch (where we enjoyed a surprise visit by the Attorney General, Hon. Doug Downey, who networked with attendees throughout the hour), we heard from three members of Voices for Mental Health: Cindy Blancher, Senior Counsel for the Public Guardian and Trustee, Stephen Lockwood, Deputy Director, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Legal Services Branch, and Stephanie Marchello, Counsel for the Ministry of Health. Voices for Mental Health is made up of Ministry of the Attorney General ("MAG") employees committed to ending the stigma and isolation surrounding mental illness and all three shared their personal experiences living and working (and often thriving!) while navigating mental health issues. FOLA has been working to get a Voices for Mental Health panel on the agenda for Plenary for a while so we were thrilled that this could finally take place. You can watch their session [here](#).

Next up was Diana Miles, CEO of the Law Society of Ontario, who updated us on the LSO's activities including policy initiatives such as Mandatory Minimum Compensation, upcoming consultations on the Certified Specialist Program, the (now released) Guide to Experiential Training and an upcoming Practice Essentials Course. She also mentioned a few upcoming events and highlighted LSO's available resources. You can watch Diana's presentation [here](#).

Following a break, Plenary attendees went off to their first of two Breakout Groups. Each participant had a choice of two out of the following three sessions: Planning and Running Strategic Planning Retreats; Coach & Advisor Network (LSO); and Managing the Media. You can learn more about the Breakout Groups [here](#). Unfortunately, only one of our Breakout Groups was recorded. As such, you can watch "Planning and Running Strategic Planning Retreats" [here](#).

Then, following a break, we headed over to the Arcadian Court for the Treasurer's Dinner, a regular feature at FOLA's Plenaries where we are treated to a speech by Law Society Treasurer Jacqueline Horvat. Jacqueline offered some insight into the new make up of Convocation and congratulated FOLA on our strong leadership role during the Benchers Election. She expressed a positive view of how she sees the new and returning Benchers working together and how FOLA can continue to have a meaningful impact. Shortly after her speech, attendees returned to the hotel to attend our Thursday evening hospitality suite hosted by FOLA sponsor [LawVO](#).

We kicked off our Friday sessions bright and early with our always popular Regional Breakfasts. While most regions hold regular meetings throughout the year, they are held by Zoom, so it's always nice for people to be able to sit together and meet face to face to discuss important issues specific to their respective regions.

Next up was FOLA's Business Meeting where we approved our updated By-Laws, passed our Budget, and elected two new Regional Directors to FOLA's Board. With FOLA's 2nd Vice Chair and Chair of our PRCC, Allen Wynperle, retiring his Central South Regional Director position (but staying on the Board) and Craig O'Brien retiring from the Board as East Regional Director, FOLA welcomes Ashely Gibson and Kevin Cooke and Central South and East Regional Directors respectively.

After a quick break, attendees broke off into their next set of Breakout Groups. Again, participants were asked to select their choice of two out of the following three sessions: Future Proof Your Law Firm; AI & The Practice Of Law?; and A Policy Half-Full: Insurance For Optimists?. You can learn more about the Breakout Groups [here](#). As with the Thursday Breakout Groups, only one was recorded. As such, you can watch "A Policy Half-Full: Insurance For Optimists?" [here](#).

Then it was time for LawPRO's presentation with Dan Pinnington, CEO. Dan provided a review of 2022, highlighted some claims trends, provided information on TitlePLUS, offered some resources for risk management, and gave us a peek into what the future might offer. You can see his video [here](#).

Our final session of our Spring 2023 Plenary was our first-ever “Update from the Courts”. Featuring Kathleen Murphy, Executive Legal Officer, Ontario Court of Justice, Alex Stornelli, Modernization Co-Ordinator, Office of the Chief Justice at the Superior Court of Justice, Lainie Basman, Senior Family Counsel, Office of the Chief Justice at the Superior Court of Justice, and Jacob Bakan, Special Counsel, Office of the Chief Justice of Ontario, Court of Appeal for Ontario as our Panelists, they dove into questions posed by Moderator Jennifer Rooke, FOLA’s Southwest Regional Representative. In preparation for this session, FOLA asked attendees for their questions but there was also some time at the end for a few questions from the floor. Highlights of the session included: significant changes over the past few years; what to expect in the future; how the Courts are addressing backlogs; why some differences in regional approaches are important; and the effectiveness of Bench & Bar events. With many Law Association members expressing frustration over a myriad of inconsistencies in procedures from region to region (and sometimes even from Court to Court), the panelists took pains to explain their constant efforts to balance needs of communities versus the drive towards improving consistency of procedures across the province. To address the backlogs, they all noted a an effort to increase number of judicial pretrials and Judge-led case management. That said, they admitted that there are simply more cases in the system than are manageable. Adding that Alternative Dispute Resolution could help as well but there is still a real problem with staff and Judicial vacancies and MAG and the federal Ministry of the Attorney General both need to work to fill these positions quickly. The Court of Appeal of Ontario (CAO) also mentioned that a portal on their website will be opening soon to gather feedback from stakeholders. The CAO added that they are making an extra effort to communicate with the public about the work they do. Examples include going into schools, speaking with community groups, and organizations such as FOLA. You can watch their discussion [here](#).

And with that, FOLA’s 1st Vice-Chair, Sam Misheal, thanked everyone for attending, organized a group photo, and concluded the event. Photo gallery is [here](#), our complete Spring 2023 Plenary Playlist is [here](#), and most of the presentation decks can be found on FOLA’s Plenary page [here](#). As a bonus, you can read an article in the LawTimes about our Plenary titled “[Federation of Ontario Law Associations aims to be a "bigger voice among lawyers"](#)”.

