

October 20, 2022

VIA EMAIL: treasurer@lso.ca

Jacqueline Horvat, Treasurer

Convocation

Law Society of Ontario

Osgoode Hall, 130 Queen Street West

Toronto, Ontario

M5H 2N6

Dear Treasurer:

RE: Potential Proposed Cuts to Courthouse Library Funding in Ontario

I am writing to you on behalf of the Toronto Lawyers Association (“TLA”). The TLA is the voice of its 3,400 members who practice law in all disciplines across the Greater Toronto Area.

I am writing to you in advance of the upcoming meeting of Convocation on October 27, 2022. I understand that during this meeting, a motion is expected to be tabled to cap Law Society of Ontario (“LSO”) membership annual dues at the 2022 level. I further understand that this motion is in direct response to recommendations to increase LSO annual dues, including a much-needed increase in the annual Library Levy. Given past reductions to library funding and the current challenging financial environment, the TLA is concerned that such a motion, if passed, would result in further funding cuts to the Ontario courthouse library system. On behalf of the TLA and its members, I strongly urge Convocation to support an increase in the Library Levy and reject any proposal that has the effect of cutting funding to courthouse libraries in Ontario.

Proper funding to courthouse libraries across Ontario is critical to the effective operation of our justice system. In the TLA’s case, our courthouse librarians support lawyers practicing in a variety of areas of law and from a variety of geographical locations in the province. In our experience, our services are often relied upon by lawyers without the means to subscribe to vast collections of online and print resources. Perhaps most importantly, we provide immediate support to lawyers with ongoing hearings of all types, including trials held at the courthouse at 361 University Avenue. With the opening of the new Toronto courthouse, at 11 Centre Avenue, in 2023, we expect a significant increase in the use of the library.

The value provided to members of the Ontario bar by our province’s courthouse libraries cannot be understated. At the TLA courthouse library, we often receive feedback from lawyers to whom we have provided assistance, and it is clear that our services are greatly appreciated. Please see the attached schedule for comments TLA librarians have received from lawyers from July to September of this year alone.

Proper funding is critical to maintaining a high level of in-person and online services to lawyers who rely upon courthouse libraries across the province to effectively represent their clients. We are greatly concerned that insufficient funding will result in an erosion of resources and, as a result, an inability to effectively assist the lawyers who require our library services the most. This is particularly true considering the increasing costs faced by law libraries across Ontario for research resources such as subscriptions to online legal resources and loose-leaf publications. A lack of proper funding will also impact our ability to appropriately staff our libraries with qualified librarians. Insufficient library funding affects not only the proper functioning of the libraries themselves, but also the quality of representation lawyers are able to provide to their clients.

It is important to note that proper funding to the Legal Information and Resource Network (“LiRN”) allows courthouse libraries to acquire and maintain high-quality legal research resources that many practitioners would otherwise be unable to access. Online subscriptions to resources such as Westlaw, LexisNexis and vLex are often cost-prohibitive for lawyers in solo and small practices. These lawyers represent a significant portion of the TLA’s membership. Courthouse libraries’ ability to offer access to these online resources is vital to these practitioners’ ability to effectively represent their clients.

As Convocation will appreciate, proper access to legal research resources is fundamental to ensuring lawyer competence in Ontario. To the extent that the LSO has recently increased its focus on lawyer competence, we believe it is critical to consider the role that a properly funded courthouse library system plays in achieving the LSO’s objective of ensuring lawyer competence.

The maintenance of an appropriate physical space for courthouse libraries across Ontario is also critical. In the TLA’s experience, lawyers often visit our library mid-hearing to request assistance with urgent matters. From a practical perspective, our courthouse library also provides lawyers visiting 361 University Avenue with an appropriate space to work that would otherwise be difficult to quickly access during breaks in their hearings.

Thank you for considering the TLA’s comments on this important issue. Our Executive Committee would be pleased to discuss these comments at your convenience, should you find additional consultation beneficial.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Erin O'Donovan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erin O'Donovan
President
Toronto Lawyers Association

cc: Law Society Benchers

Schedule

Comments from lawyers received between July and September, 2022.

- It really is wonderful the way that you and everyone else in the Library always come through for me.
- Thank you so much for your work on this one! As always, you are a life saver.
- You guys are the absolute best! What will the estates bar do without your access to esoteric cases from hundreds of years ago. Thank you!!
- Wow, thank you!! You ladies never fail to amaze at the quality of response and support, thank you. This is exactly what I need.
- This was perfect, thank you to you and your team! You're a star as always.
- You are awesome.
- Glad for your help as I don't have the same resources plus you're saving me time too.
- Thank you so much. This was really helpful.
- You are fast. Thank you very much.
- Thank you for your below email. As always, your excellent services and follow up are much appreciated. Wishing a happy and healthy summer to you and your family.
- I have been so grateful for the help that I have received from the TLA.
- This looks really helpful, thanks so much.
- This was exactly what I needed. Thank you so much for your help.
- Thank you very much for the quick response!
- That was FAST. You guys are awesome. Thank you SO MUCH.
- Thank you for your prompt response! What you provided is great!
- Amazing, thanks so much! I always tell colleagues that the TLA is lightning fast.
- Received, thank you. Most useful.
- Thanks! These are really helpful.
- Thanks. Your team is the best and I really appreciate your help.
- I want you to know that your work, this service, is incredible. I know I say that every time, but your quality of product is so outstanding that I only ever ask out of near desperation.
- Thanks so much for this. These are perfect and exactly what I need. Much appreciated!
- You totally rock! Thank you for the zippy fulfilment of this request.
- Thank you! This is exactly what I was looking for.
- I will get back to you if I need more. But this is really darned awesome.
- Thank you, you are a lifesaver! Very much appreciated.
- Thanks so much. These look very helpful.
- Thank you! Prompt and thorough as always!
- Thank you so much! That was extremely helpful.