



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **PUBLIC COMMISSION ON LEGAL AID ESTABLISHED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

*Public Commission will engage British Columbians on legal aid; encourage stakeholders and citizens to make submissions, inform progressive solutions*

**VANCOUVER, B.C. June 24, 2010**—The establishment of a Public Commission on Legal Aid (Public Commission) is announced today in British Columbia. The Public Commission is a joint project of the Canadian Bar Association - British Columbia Branch, the Law Society of British Columbia, the Law Foundation of British Columbia, the British Columbia Crown Counsel Association, the Vancouver Bar Association and the Victoria Bar Association.

The goal of the Public Commission is to engage the people of British Columbia regarding legal aid in the province through a series of cross-provincial Commission Hearings that will commence in September of 2010. Upon completion of the hearings, a comprehensive written report will be prepared and delivered to the governments of British Columbia and Canada.

The president of the Canadian Bar Association - British Columbia Branch, James Bond, notes several reasons behind the formation of the Public Commission. "There are simply not sufficient legal aid services available for British Columbians who need them. Funding which was cut several years ago has never been restored, and government funding has largely remained static in recent years. In addition, economic factors have had an adverse effect on other funding sources, while demand for legal aid services has increased", says Bond. "There is a recognition however, that unless government hears that the people of British Columbia consider legal aid a priority, it is unlikely that the difficulties which legal aid programs have faced over the last two decades are going to change."

The Public Commission on Legal Aid will be led by Leonard Doust, Q.C., a well-respected senior member of the legal profession in the province. President of the Law Society of British Columbia and Public Commission on Legal Aid Steering Committee Member, Glen Ridgway points to Mr. Doust's notable past accomplishments and his exceptional reputation within the legal community in British Columbia as key among the many reasons Doust has been appointed to the position. "We are extremely pleased to have an individual with the depth of experience of Leonard Doust as the Commissioner for the Public Commission on Legal Aid," says Ridgway. "Mr. Doust has a long and distinguished history in the province of British Columbia and is continually recognized by his peers as one of the best lawyers in Canada."

Decisions regarding the B.C. communities which the Public Commission will visit, and a timeline for those visits, is still being finalized. Details of provincial hearing dates will be released in coming weeks.



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### ***About the Public Commission on Legal Aid***

The Public Commission on Legal Aid has been established and is supported by six funding partners including the Canadian Bar Association - British Columbia Branch, the Law Society of British Columbia, the Law Foundation of British Columbia, the British Columbia Crown Counsel Association, the Vancouver Bar Association and the Victoria Bar Association. Led by Commissioner Leonard Doust Q.C., the purpose of the Public Commission is to engage British Columbians and determine their priorities in regard to legal aid. From September through October 2010, the Public Commission will convene meetings across British Columbia and invite submissions from interested parties, including residents, community organization representatives, and justice system stakeholders.

The Public Commission will, at its conclusion, make recommendations to improve legal aid in B.C., based on a series of questions and the answers provided throughout the provincial hearing process. A dedicated website with further information on the Public Commission is in development, and will be announced in coming weeks, along with a finalized list of hearing communities and dates.

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