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February 8, 2010

Honourable Dr. Moira Stilwell
Minister of Advanced Education and
Labour Market Development
PO BOX 9059 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Stilwell,

It has come to our attention that you may be considering lifting the tuition fee cap on professional programs. I am writing to express West Coast LEAF's concern about this possibility, and to discuss with you the implications for access to justice in this province.

A decrease in new lawyers choosing to specialize in the practice of family law is having a detrimental impact on access to justice for women. In January 2009, West Coast LEAF produced a report entitled "Not with a ten foot pole: Law students' perceptions of family law practice". The report was based on a survey of law students; the idea of the survey emerged as we worked with various community groups, advocates and front-line workers who kept raising the issue of decreasing family law lawyers available to them on their referral lists.

The report found that many students made career decisions based at least in part on their debt loads from their legal education, and that family law was not considered to be a lucrative area of practice. West Coast LEAF is concerned that increases in tuition at professional schools in BC may further decrease the number of new lawyers going into the practice of family law, and therefore may negatively impact women's access to legal advice and representation for their family law matters.

I am attaching our report to this letter, or you can view it online at <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/userfiles/file/Not%20with%20a%20ten%20foot%20pole.pdf>. We would appreciate clarification on whether you are indeed considering any changes to the current tuition fee cap policy, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue (and the related findings and recommendations of our report) with you further.

Thank you for considering our concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kasari Govender
Legal Director

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