

22nd Annual Equality Breakfast - SOLD OUT

Canadian icon and comedian [Mary Walsh](#) will be in Vancouver March 13th, 2009 as the keynote speaker for West Coast LEAF's 22nd Annual Equality Breakfast at the Vancouver Fairmont Hotel. Walsh will be commenting on the current status of women in Canada, including issues such as pay equity, gender roles and the balance of women in politics.

"We are delighted Mary Walsh agreed to be our speaker," said Alison Brewin, Executive Director of West Coast LEAF. "International Women's Day is a day to celebrate women around the world. Unfortunately women's rights are sliding here in BC - in their 2008 report on Canada, the UN expressed concern that rather than improving, inequalities between British Columbians are becoming more pronounced. Mary Walsh - thank goodness - will help us keep our sense of humour about the work ahead of us."

With a career spanning 20 years, Mary is an accomplished Canadian actress, comedian, political satirist and social activist. Best known for her work on This Hour Has 22 Minutes, she is the winner of over thirty Gemini Awards for her writing and performances.

The West Coast LEAF Equality Breakfast takes place annually to celebrate International Women's Day and the progress made in advancing women's rights. Past speakers include 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Iranian human-rights lawyer [Dr. Shirin Ebadi](#) (2008) and counsel for *Roe v Wade*, [Sarah Weddington](#) (2007).

The 2009 breakfast is sold out.

[International Women's Day \(IWD\)](#) is a major day of global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future.

Open letter presented to Attorney General: Cuts in legal aid in BC will have a devastating impact on women

On Tuesday, February 24, Kasari Govender, Legal Director of the West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF), met with Attorney General Wally Oppal to present the first 1000 signatures supporting an open letter protesting cuts to legal aid in B.C.

[Pivot Legal Society](#) and West Coast LEAF began collecting signatures to illuminate the concern about the recent continuation of cuts to legal aid in B.C. that will have a devastating impact on women, particularly those living in poverty, women of colour, Aboriginal women, and other marginalized women.

"Women must have fair and equal access to the justice system," says Govender. "It is time to restore services and to develop a comprehensive strategy for building a legal aid system which ensures that women have equal access to the justice system in British Columbia."

The most recent erosion of legal services in B.C. includes:

- The closing of the family law clinic
- Stricter screening processes and eligibility requirements for clients
- Cuts to the tariffs for family, immigration and criminal law
- Reductions in services for people who cannot access legal representation through the [Legal Services Society](#) (LSS), including cuts to the staffing of the LawLINE, and
- Reductions in staff lawyers

LSS staff lawyers currently take cases that private lawyers simply cannot take on and most often these are cases that involve complicating factors, such as, insecure immigration status, litigation

harassment by an ex partner, a history of domestic violence and/or mental illness. While Govender has presented the first 1000 signatures today, West Coast LEAF has an eventual goal of 5000 supporting signatures.

To join the organizations and individuals expressing concern about the recent legal aid cuts through our Access to Justice petition, please go [here](#).

About [West Coast LEAF](#)

West Coast LEAF's mission is to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of discrimination against women through BC based equality rights litigation, law reform and public legal education.

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