

## West Coast LEAF News Alert April 20, 2009



### Join West Coast LEAF at a town hall forum to renew our commitment to legal aid

**What:** Renewing our Commitment to Legal Aid: A Town Hall Forum. Featuring the premiere of [Justice For All?](#) a short documentary on the vital importance of legal aid in BC. We will propose a resolution calling on all political parties to commit to public hearings about the future of legal aid in BC.

**When:** April 27, 2009, 7-9:30 pm

**Where:** Vancouver Public Library Main Branch 350 West Georgia Street, Alice MacKay Room

**Who:** Stephen Owen, Dr. Melina Buckley (counsel, CBA Civil Legal Aid Challenge), Shashi Assanand (Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services) and Shelagh Day. Moderated by Mark Forsythe of CBC's BC Almanac.

For more information please go [here](#) or call 604-581-6662.

Event Sponsors:

- BC Civil Liberties Association
- BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- Community Legal Assistance Society
- Pivot Legal Society
- Professional Employees Association
- Progressive Intercultural Community Services
- TRAC Tenants Resource & Advisory Centre
- West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
- Western Canada Society to Access Justice

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The recent cuts to legal aid will be devastating to women, particularly those living in poverty, women of colour, Aboriginal women, and other marginalized women. These cuts are taking place at a time when Canada is already being criticized for its failure to meet its international obligation to ensure that women have equal access to the justice system.

[Join us in calling for broad systemic reform of legal aid to ensure access to justice for all.](#)

*The following are comments on the Access to Justice petition.*

*Please restore legal aid in BC. As a marginalised person fighting a major physical disability, I am appalled at the serious lack of professionalism that has been shown to myself and my good friend not just by legal aid, but many other government agencies.*

*The impact that I have personally faced with lack of legal aid or legal resources in our area has been emotional devastating and directly impacts my health from the constant stress I find myself under.*

*We are two physically disabled low-income people. We found ourselves in a legal situation that involved a disabled man who was charged with criminal act he did not commit. Legal Aid was not able to represent this client and did not have funding to research the events and allegations that took place over the two month period. We had to on our own get all the Freedom of Information, from Ottawa RCMP, (which our first Legal Aid Lawyer refused to help us obtain - due to lack of funding) Interior Health, doctors' records, Residential Tenancy Act and Income Assistance information. This took two physically disabled persons working 4 hrs a day / 5 days a week for over nine months, to get all the relevant information to prove his innocence.*

*In our anti-violence work, we see the results of already limited legal aid - in women's safety, access to justice, custody and access. We do not want to see any further erosion of legal aid services/funding.*

*Cutting front line services to needy people at a time of economic distress and uncertainty is particularly poignant and misdirected.*

*I am lucky enough to have a legal advocate who was able to tell me a little bit about the courts and tell me about duty counsel before I went to court. If they weren't there, what chance is there of "justice" being carried out? When you get divorced, you don't know how much at a disadvantage you are or that people will use your ignorance to their advantage. Not everyone is looking out for justice or a fair trial, namely those who support cuts to the legal education systems or programs.*

*I am deeply concerned about cuts to legal aid. Indigenous people are already vastly overrepresented in the justice system and are highly criminalized. Cuts to legal aid will only perpetuate this further. I am also concerned about how these cuts will negatively impact refugee claimants, women involved in the child welfare system and those who commit crimes of poverty. These cuts will have a devastating impact on those who are already most vulnerable. We need more legal aid, not less.*

#### **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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