

West Coast LEAF arguing for access to justice in *SWUAV v AG Canada* today

For immediate release

Thursday January 21 – The West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund for women (West Coast LEAF) will be intervening at the BC Court of Appeal today in support of "public interest standing" in *SWUAV v. AG Canada*.

The case involves an organization of women (Downtown Eastside Sex Workers United Against Violence or "SWUAV") and a former sex worker who are bringing a constitutional challenge to sections of the *Criminal Code* dealing with prostitution.

The case was dismissed by the BC Supreme Court in December 2008 in part because the Court found that this group did not have "public interest standing" to bring this constitutional challenge.

West Coast LEAF is intervening to argue that representative groups such as SWUAV should be allowed to bring forward important constitutional cases on behalf of those who do not have effective access to the justice system on their own.

"West Coast LEAF is committed to ensuring that the test for public interest standing allows women, particularly vulnerable women, equal access to courts to enforce their equality rights" says Legal Director Kasari Govender. "We need an application of the public interest standing test that is consistent with the *Charter* value of equality, international human rights treaties and the fundamental constitutional guarantee of access to justice. To do otherwise is to make the public interest standing test into a barrier to equal access to justice for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups."

The appeal will be heard today and tomorrow at the BC Court of Appeal. Constitutional lawyer Melina Buckley is co-counsel for the intervention along with Govender. Other interveners include the BC Civil Liberties Association and the Trial Lawyers Association of BC.

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

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