

For Immediate Release

***Safe access to abortion services upheld by BC Court of appeals:  
R v Watson and Spratt dismissed***

September 4, 2008 - The British Columbia Court of Appeal has upheld the provision of safe access to abortion services in BC by dismissing the appeal *R v Watson and Spratt* today.

Clinic staff, service providers and reproductive rights supporters are relieved and thrilled by the news.

“We’re all extremely thrilled and pleased that this has been the result,” says Jill Doctoroff, Director of the Elizabeth Bagshaw Women’s Clinic. “This is a legal medical procedure happening at an accredited facility, and we’re really pleased that medical staff will not be harassed and patients are able to access a medical service in a medical facility with dignity and respect.”

“We feel absolute joy and deep satisfaction with this decision today. This decision upholds the right of women to access this legal medical service in a private dignified manner,” says Cheryl Davies, vice president of BC Women's Hospital Ambulatory Programs.

Watson and Spratt challenged the *Access to Abortion Services Act*, which creates a no-protest (“bubble”) zone around abortion clinics to allow women access to clinic services free of unwanted approaches by anti-abortion protesters.

Watson and Spratt argued that the bubble zone law violated their *Charter* right to freedom of expression. A coalition of abortion service providers and pro-choice organizations, including LEAF, intervened to support the legislation. The case was argued last fall.

“I’m happy that we don’t have to face the prospect of women suffering under intimidation and harassment anymore,” says Joyce Arthur, of the pro-Choice Action Network. “I don’t think we’re going to go backwards...the Canadian public supports abortion rights.”

The Coalition includes the Every Women’s Health Centre Society, the Elizabeth Bagshaw Women’s Clinic, the B.C. Women’s CARE Program (of the B.C. Women’s Hospital and Health Centre), The Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF) and the Pro-Choice Action Network. Counsel Nitya Iyer of Heenan Blaikie (and West Coast LEAF Board member) represented the Watson Spratt Coalition.

West Coast LEAF strives to make the promise of the *Charter* a reality for the women of British Columbia.

LEAF is the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, a national non-profit organization founded in 1985. LEAF works to advance the equality of all women and girls in Canada through litigation, law reform and public education using the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

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**For additional information or to schedule an interview contact:**

**Fiona York, Director of Development and Communications**

**West Coast LEAF**

[info@westcoastleaf.org](mailto:info@westcoastleaf.org)

604-684-8772 ext 113

1-866-737-7716

**Jill Doctoroff, Director**

**Elizabeth Bagshaw Women's Clinic**

[ebwc@telus.net](mailto:ebwc@telus.net)

604-736-0995

**Joyce Arthur**

**Pro-Choice Action Network**

[jharthur@shaw.ca](mailto:jharthur@shaw.ca)

604-351-0867

**Cheryl Davies, VP**

**BC Women's Ambulatory Programs**

[cdavies2@cw.bc.ca](mailto:cdavies2@cw.bc.ca)

604-875-2856

**Nitya Iyer, Counsel, Watson Spratt Coalition**

**President, West Coast LEAF**

[niyer@heenan.ca](mailto:niyer@heenan.ca)

604-891-1195