

West Coast LEAF presenting open letter to Attorney General today

Cuts in legal aid in BC will have a devastating impact on women

Vancouver, Feb 24 - Today, Kasari Govender, Legal Director of the West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF), will meet 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 will present the first 1000 signatures today, West Coast LEAF has an eventual goal of 5000 supporting signatures. To view the letter to the Attorney General in its entirety, visit: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/access-to-justice>

About West Coast LEAF:

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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Legal Director, Kasari Govender will be available for media interviews. To arrange an interview or for more information please contact:

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