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For Immediate Media Release

Women's Group Supports Legal Services Society Refusal to Implement Government Cuts

VANCOUVER – “It is fiscally irresponsible, not to mention morally repugnant, to force the Legal Services Society to function on \$54 million by 2004-05,” says Audrey Johnson, Executive Director of West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund, a non-profit organization that advances women’s equality using the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

“We fully support the Legal Services Society’s refusal to implement the government’s cuts. These cuts will cripple its ability to provide adequate services to the people of this province”, says Johnson.

In a letter to Attorney General Geoff Plant, Johnson reminds the minister that the government of British Columbia has been taxing the legal services of lawyers since 1992 and collecting approximately \$90 million dollars annually - funds specifically for the provision of legal aid services. There are also funds from the federal government earmarked for legal services that have not been adequately accounted for.

“The proposed closure of Poverty law, Family law and Community and Native law offices will be disastrous for low income women and other marginalized people who have no other means of seeking legal recourse to secure their social and economic rights,” says Johnson. “It will leave them at risk of increased homelessness, violence, and even death,”

While the government in BC is taking away the social and economic rights of its citizens through cuts to social programs and services, it is also attacking the legal justice system – a system that exists to protect individual and collective rights.

“The measures that the government is taking is not within the spirit of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and merits further investigation,” says Johnson. West Coast LEAF is joining other community groups in supporting the Legal Services Society and in seeking potential legal strategies to ensure the government actions do not further erode the social and economic rights of the people of British Columbia.

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