



Law Society  
of Ontario

Barreau  
de l'Ontario

TAB 8

# Report from the Treasurer's Women in Law Advisory Group

## *(For Information)*

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# Purpose

To provide information to Convocation on the activities of the Treasurer's Women in Law Advisory Group and the supports available to women licensees.

# Background

On April 21, 2021, the Law Society of Ontario (Law Society) hosted the inaugural Treasurer's Roundtable on Women in Law (Roundtable) in collaboration with the Canadian Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges (CCIAWJ). The Roundtable was chaired by Treasurer Teresa Donnelly. Justice Renee Pomerance of the Superior Court of Justice and Justice Mara Greene of the Ontario Court of Justice attended as representatives of CCIAWJ. A diverse group of over 60 women participated in the event, representing a range of backgrounds, experiences and stages of practice.

The overarching theme from the Roundtable discussions was that persistent challenges face women in law despite advances in the field. The Roundtable participants generated a number of recommendations directed at the Law Society to address gender specific issues in practice.

# Law Society Response

In July 2021, Treasurer Donnelly struck the inaugural Women in Law Advisory Group (Advisory Group) to provide guidance on gender equity strategies in legal workplaces and effective approaches that the Law Society can undertake in addressing women's issues.

Recently, the Advisory Group assessed how Law Society programs and initiatives align with the recommendations that emerged from the Roundtable.

Below are the Roundtable recommendations directed at the Law Society and a discussion of how Law Society strategies respond to identified needs.

1. Collect data on women in the legal professions through surveys, studies and focus groups.

Strategy: The Law Society retains Navigator Ltd. to analyze trends among legal professionals who have filed a change of status and benchmark movements and changes of women lawyers and paralegals.<sup>1</sup> The Law Society also collects self-identification data through the Lawyer and Paralegal Annual Report Filings. This data is analyzed to reveal the changes in the profession over time and in

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<sup>1</sup> Reports from Navigator can be found on the Law Society website: [Change of Status Survey – Lawyers \(2020\)](#) and [Change of Status Survey - Paralegals \(2020\)](#).

comparison to the Ontario population.<sup>2</sup> The Law Society intends to continue studying these analytics to better understand longitudinal trends. In addition, through the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel program semi-annual reports, anonymized statistical data is collected so the Law Society can better understand the dynamic and nature of concerns about discrimination and harassment in the legal professions and address possible systemic issues.

2. Create an enhanced resource hub where women lawyers and paralegals can find resources, supports and professional tools.

Strategy: Currently, the Law Society's website offers a number of resources aimed at improving workplace conditions and enhancing professional experiences for women legal professionals and trainees.

Over the course of the next several months, these resources will be updated and the Law Society will launch a new resource hub on its website. The hub will consist primarily of resources for individual women lawyers, paralegals, law students and licensing candidates to use in their professional lives. It is expected that the hub will be launched in late 2022.

3. Produce timely reports and recommendations to help law firms and legal employers address persistent gender inequities in the professions.

Strategy: In addition to the change of status reports referenced above, the Law Society partnered with several law firms to launch the Justicia Project in 2008. The upcoming review and updating of resources will include the Justicia Project and the adding of new resources to the Law Society website.

4. Support and promote mentorship and sponsorship programs across the professions.

Strategy: Mentors share knowledge and guidance with mentees while sponsors advocate for their mentees. The Coach and Advisor Network (CAN) is an opportunity for women licensees to connect with experienced mentors for coaching or file specific advice. Coaches can provide support on a variety of practice management and best practices including work-life balance strategies, time management, career development, transition to practice following a leave of absence and more. One consideration is to have coaches advise licensees on sponsorship and methods to seek out sponsors. The Law Society will continue to consider how CAN can support women licensees.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: [Statistical Snapshot of Lawyers in Ontario from the Lawyer Annual Report \(LAR\) 2018](#); [Statistical Snapshot of Paralegals in Ontario from the Paralegal Annual Report \(LAR\) 2018](#).

The Competence Task Force Report May 2022 acknowledged the importance of mentorship and CAN as part of the competence framework. Task Force Members encouraged the Law Society to consider opportunities to promote and facilitate mentorship awareness and relationships by:

- emphasizing the importance of mentorship relationships;
  - encouraging licensees to be coaches, advisors or mentors;
  - producing resources for licensees on how to make the most of these relationships;
  - establishing a program on effective mentor/mentee-ship; and
  - promoting and providing more resources to the Coach and Advisor Network.
5. Become more vocal about the problem of harassment and discrimination in the professions and reinforce professional ethics.

Strategy: Since 1999, the Law Society has funded the independently operated and confidential Discrimination and Harassment Counsel (DHC) program. The program offers information and assistance to lawyer and paralegal licensees, licensing candidates, law and paralegal students and members of the public who may have experienced harassment and discrimination by a licensed lawyer, paralegal or student member of the Law Society of Ontario. The education and outreach function of the DHC has always been a critical element of the program.<sup>3</sup> In support of this, the Law Society recently launched an awareness campaign to promote the DHC program. The goals are to inform the professions about the services provided by the DHC as well as how and when to contact the DHC for assistance. The DHC website is also being redesigned with an anticipated launch in Fall 2022. The Law Society is exploring avenues to connect with potential DHC clients including outreach to specific stakeholder organizations. In addition, the newly introduced Discrimination and Harassment Educator within the DHC program will develop educational materials and deliver presentations with a focus on paralegal students, licensing candidates and practising paralegals. The outreach and education efforts will be expanded to law students, lawyers and lawyer licensing candidates over time.

6. Allow licensees to make anonymous complaints to the Law Society.

Strategy: If the Law Society receives an anonymous complaint and is able to respond to it (i.e., a valid email or return address is included), the Law Society can offer resources, including referrals to the DHC or other bodies. Individuals can

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<sup>3</sup> See By-Law 11, s, 19(1)(b).

anonymously contact the DHC directly and obtain services without disclosing either their own identity or the identity of the lawyer or paralegal about whom they have concerns.

7. Examine best practices from other organizations that effectively address women's issues in practice.

Strategy: The Law Society participates in the Federation of Law Societies of Canada's Law Societies Equity Network (LSEN) as well as the Federation's Sexual Harassment Working Group. These two bodies share knowledge and information, including best practices across jurisdictions related to women's issues in practice. The Law Society also monitors the Federation's online resources page that includes interjurisdictional information related to women's issues.

8. Provide more dedicated resources for articling students and licensing candidates.

Strategy: In 2017, the Law Society commissioned the Articling Experience Survey to assess the quality and effectiveness of articling placements. In 2018, the SPOT (Steps, Progress, Opportunities, and Tactics) Team was created in response to survey findings of discrimination and harassment. Several tactics were implemented including strengthening the rules of professional conduct, enhancing access to the DHC and Member Assistance Program (MAP), and offering relevant CPD. In addition to the DHC and the MAP, articling and licensing candidates have access to a suite of well-being resources, tutoring and a loan program. In November 2021, Convocation approved enhancements to the experiential training component of the lawyer licensing process.

9. Enhancing mental health resources for licensees.

Strategy: In February 2022, the Law Society launched a Well-Being Resource Centre where legal professionals can access a wide range of innovative mental health and wellbeing supports. In addition, the confidential and independent MAP provided by Homewood Health, is available to all lawyers, paralegals, law students, paralegal students, and judges in Ontario, as well as their family members. MAP is free and offers counselling, coaching, online resources and peer volunteers. Members can get professional help with issues related to addictions, mental or physical health, work-life balance, career, family and more.

## Conclusion

The Law Society is well positioned to continue to support women in law. The organization offers a range of programs that assist in measuring outcomes, enhancing professional experience and supporting the overall well-being of women in the legal professions. The

upcoming resource hub will provide a catalogue of additional practical tools that can be used to navigate professional challenges, workplace opportunities and career transitions.