



Law Society
of Ontario

Barreau
de l'Ontario

TAB 7

Equity and Indigenous Affairs Committee

Report on the Activities of the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel

For Information

February 29, 2024

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Purpose

The Equity and Indigenous Affairs Committee (the “Committee”) submits the following report to Convocation for information: Report of the Activities of the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel (the “DHC”) for the Law Society of Ontario for the period of July 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023. The report is attached at **Tab 7.1**.

Context

The DHC provides regular reports on its activities to the Committee as outlined in subsection 20(1) of By-law 11, *Regulation of Conduct, Capacity and Professional Competence*. The DHC submitted their report on their activities from July 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023 to the Committee on January 31, 2024.

The DHC assists anyone who may have experienced discrimination or harassment based on human rights grounds by a lawyer, paralegal or student member of the Law Society. The DHC is funded by the Law Society but operates independently. As per By-law 11, information received by the DHC is kept confidential. The only information provided to the Law Society is anonymous statistical data showing the number and type of complaints and anonymous demographic data about complainants.

**REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF
THE DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT COUNSEL
FOR THE LAW SOCIETY OF ONTARIO**

For the period from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023

Prepared by Fay Faraday

Discrimination and Harassment Counsel

31 January 2024

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A. INTRODUCTION

1. Under their respective *Rules of Professional Conduct* and *Paralegal Rules of Conduct*, lawyers and paralegals licensed in Ontario have legal and ethical obligations as professionals to deliver their services and engage in and conduct their employment practices in a manner that is free of discrimination and harassment.
2. Rules 6.3 and 6.3.1 of the *Rules of Professional Conduct* set out these professional obligations for lawyers as follows:

6.3-3 A lawyer shall not sexually harass a colleague, a staff member, a client, or any other person.

6.3.1-1 A lawyer has a special responsibility to respect the requirements of human rights laws in force in Ontario and, specifically, to honour the obligation not to discriminate on the grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences (as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code), marital status, family status, or disability with respect to professional employment of other lawyers, articulated students, or any other person or in professional dealings with other licensees or any other person.

6.3.1-2 A lawyer shall ensure that no one is denied services or receives inferior service on the basis of the grounds set out in this rule.

6.3.1-3 A lawyer shall ensure that their employment practices do not offend rule 6.3.1-1, 6.3.1-2 and 6.3-3.

3. The “requirements of human rights laws in force in Ontario” that lawyers have a “special responsibility to respect” are the prohibitions against both discrimination or harassment on prohibited grounds of discrimination listed in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. The discrimination or harassment must also have occurred within one of the social areas recognized in the *Human Rights Code* (discrimination or harassment in relation to goods, services and facilities; accommodation; employment; contracts; and vocational associations).

4. These *Rules of Professional Conduct* are supplemented by 29 paragraphs of commentary that provide guidance on the interpretation and application of these *Rules* and outline how they are anchored in equivalent legal obligations under the provincial *Human Rights Code* and *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
5. Rule 2.03 of the *Paralegal Rules of Conduct* holds paralegals to professional standards of human rights compliance as follows:
 - (3) A paralegal shall not engage in sexual or other forms of harassment of a colleague, a staff member, a client or any other person on the ground of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability.
 - (4) A paralegal shall respect the requirements of human rights laws in force in Ontario and without restricting the generality of the foregoing, a paralegal shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability with respect to the employment of others or in dealings with other licensees or any other person.
 - (5) The right to equal treatment without discrimination because of sex includes the right to equal treatment without discrimination because a woman is or may become pregnant.
 - (6) A paralegal shall ensure that no one is denied services or receives inferior service on the basis of the grounds set out in this rule.
 - (7) A paralegal shall ensure that his or her employment practices do not offend this rule.
6. The Discrimination and Harassment Counsel (DHC) program was established in 1999 as an independent office funded by, but operating at arm's length from, the Law Society of Ontario. The DHC began operating in the fall of 1999 to provide information to and support individuals who had experienced discrimination or harassment by licensees contrary to their binding rules of professional conduct as

a means to help eradicate discrimination in the legal profession.¹

7. In carrying out its functions, the DHC supports the LSO's core regulatory function of holding licensees accountable for compliance with their *Rules of Professional Conduct* and *Paralegal Code of Conduct*. This is necessary to ensure that public trust in the self-governing legal professions is not eroded by abuses of power through discriminatory or harassing behaviour by professionals.
8. The DHC can be accessed by email at assistance@dhcounsel.on.ca, or toll-free by phone at 1-877-790-2200.
9. The DHC serves two important functions:
 - (a) The DHC provides a range of confidential services to individuals who have concerns or complaints about discrimination or harassment by lawyers or paralegals licensed in Ontario, or by students in the Ontario licensing process; and
 - (b) The DHC provides anonymized statistical data to the Law Society of Ontario so that the regulator can better understand the dynamic and nature of concerns about discrimination and harassment that are being raised in the legal professions and address possibly systemic issues of discrimination and harassment in the legal professions. This statistical data is released publicly to support public accountability of a profession that is self-governing.
10. The DHC services are provided without charge to members of the public as well as to licensees, legal staff and students.
11. In order to fall within the mandate of the DHC Program, allegations of misconduct must be based on one or more of the prohibited grounds of discrimination listed in

¹ In its current mandate, the DHC does not provide representation or legal advice to individuals, nor does the DHC investigate or decide complaints.

the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, in one or more of the five social areas to which the *Code* applies. This is the discriminatory conduct prohibited by the Law Society's codes of conduct for licensees. Personal harassment (e.g. intimidation and bullying) that is not based on any of the listed prohibited grounds does not fall within the mandate of the DHC Program.

12. The complaints reported to the DHC arise in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to:
 - (a) clients who report that they have been subjected to discrimination or harassment by their own lawyer or paralegal;
 - (b) participants in litigation – whether they are clients, witnesses, articling students, paralegals or lawyers – who have experienced discrimination and/or harassment by opposing counsel or opposing paralegals and justice system employees (such as court/tribunal staff, law firm staff, process servers, etc.) who have experienced discrimination and/or harassment by licensees in the course of litigation;
 - (c) law firm employees, summer students, articling students, licensing program students, paralegals and lawyers who are experiencing or have experienced harassment and/or discrimination by licensees in the workplace based on intersecting or distinct grounds of prohibited discrimination;
 - (d) service providers, law firm employees, law students, summer students, articling students, licensing program students, paralegals and lawyers who are experiencing and/or have experienced discrimination and/or harassment by licensees in the context of professional training programs, continuing professional education programs, public or privately hosted legal events; and
 - (e) members of the public, service providers, law firm employees, law students, summer students, articling students, licensing program students, paralegals

and lawyers who are experiencing or have experienced discrimination and/or harassment by licensees in other contexts which implicate the licensees' professional obligations.

13. People also contact the DHC with a range of concerns that are related or adjacent to discriminatory and harassing behaviour by licensees. These include complaints about licensees' lack of compliance with other elements of their respective rules of professional conduct; complaints about abusive employment within legal offices; complaints about judicial conduct; complaints about discrimination and harassment involving licensees from other provinces; and discrimination and harassment complaints not involving lawyers or paralegals. People also contact the DHC program seeking information proactively about the nature of services provided by the program. For all of these related or adjacent issues, the DHC provides information and guidance about other resources that the individual can access but does not provide the more extensive coaching, mediation or conciliation services that are outlined in the next section of this report. The number of contacts that are wholly unconnected to the DHC's mandate are very limited.
14. The DHC services are delivered by Fay Faraday, Lai-King Hum and Natasha Persaud. The Counsel on duty rotates each week. When any individual Counsel is unable to act due to a conflict of interest, one of the other Counsels handles the matter. To promote accessibility for those who contact the DHC office, the biographies of Ms Faraday, Ms Hum and Ms Persaud are posted on the DHC website. Ms Hum assists individuals who seek service in French.

B. SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DHC

15. The DHC provides individuals who have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment by lawyers and/or paralegals an opportunity to discuss their concerns confidentially with a knowledgeable and empathetic listener who is an expert in discrimination and harassment law and issues, who has skills of mediation and conciliation regarding human rights, who has skills of cultural

competence, and who is committed to promoting compliance with professional ethical standards in the legal professions.

16. The DHC also supports lawyers and paralegals to comply with their professional rules of conduct by participating in continuing professional education events to advance licensees' training on the substantive legal issues and best practices to ensure compliance with their codes of conduct and human rights laws.
17. The DHC does not provide legal advice or legal representation. The DHC does not conduct investigations or fact-finding. Instead, the DHC provides general information and guidance to complainants to assist them in identifying and evaluating their options to resolve their concerns, provides information to licensees to support best practices, and where appropriate, provides focused mediation or conciliation. The nature of services provided is outlined below.

i. Counselling, Data Collection and Coaching for Self-Help

18. For some complainants, the ability to talk through their issues confidentially with an objective, knowledgeable outsider is all they want.
19. Some complainants want to report their experiences to the DHC so that their experiences will be recorded as part of the DHC's semi-annual statistics. For complainants, this is an important means of alerting the legal profession to the reality and frequency of discrimination and harassment by licensees and of providing an evidence-based foundation for change.
20. In some cases, strategic tips and/or coaching are provided by the DHC to complainants who want to handle a situation directly by themselves.
21. The DHC also provides informal resolutions, which involve education or reminders to respondent licensees by way of a discussion with the DHC. This coaching of respondent licensees aims to ensure that they understand their professional obligations regarding human rights compliance in their service delivery and workplaces and that they move toward best practices. This informal coaching may

be appropriate in situations where the complainant wishes to remain anonymous but authorizes the DHC to contact the respondent, advise them of their alleged behaviour in breach of human rights without making any finding, and educate or remind the respondent of their professional and legal obligations. Even though the DHC cannot make any factual findings, such calls are effective in providing education and guidance to respondent licensees.

ii. Information about Avenues of Recourse

22. Complainants who contact the DHC are informed about the avenues of recourse available to them, including (where applicable):
- (a) speaking to their union representative (if they are unionized and the complaint relates to their employment);
 - (b) filing an internal complaint within their workplace (if the complaint relates to their employment);
 - (c) making a complaint to the respondent licensee's employer (e.g. the managing partner of the respondent's law firm or supervisor of a respondent who works in-house or in government);
 - (d) filing an application with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario or the Canadian Human Rights Commission;
 - (e) filing a formal complaint of professional misconduct with the Law Society;
 - (f) contacting the police (where criminal conduct is alleged);
 - (g) filing a complaint about an articling principal with the Law Society's Articling Program;
 - (h) contacting the Human Rights Legal Support Centre for legal advice on Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario matters; and
 - (i) contacting a lawyer regarding possible civil causes of action.

23. Complainants are provided with information about each of these options, including:
- (a) what (if any) costs might be involved in pursuing an option;
 - (b) whether legal representation is required in order to pursue an option;
 - (c) referral to resources on how to obtain legal representation such as the Law Society's Lawyer Referral Service, <https://lso.ca/public-resources/finding-a-lawyer-or-paralegal/law-society-referral-service>, (actual referrals to specific lawyers, paralegals or law firms are not made by the DHC);
 - (d) how to file a complaint or initiate an application (e.g. whether it can be done electronically, whether there are filing fees, whether particular forms are required, where to locate the requisite forms, etc.);
 - (e) what processes are involved in pursuing any of the available options (e.g. investigation, conciliation, mediation, adjudication, etc.);
 - (f) what general types of remedies might be available in different fora (e.g. compensatory remedies in contrast to disciplinary penalties; reinstatement to employment versus monetary damages; public interest remedies); and
 - (g) what general time limits exist for each avenue of redress (complainants are advised to seek legal advice with respect to specific limitation periods).

Complainants are advised that the options available to them are generally not mutually exclusive (though some exceptions apply).

iii. Resolution Services

24. In addition to being advised about the above-noted options, where appropriate, complainants are offered resolution services (mediation or conciliation).
25. Whenever formal mediation is offered, the nature and purpose of mediation is explained, including that it is a confidential and voluntary process, that it does not

involve any investigation or fact-finding, and that the DHC acts as a neutral facilitator to attempt to assist the parties in negotiating the terms of a mutually satisfactory settlement of the issues raised in the complaint.

26. When a complainant opts for mediation, they are given the choice of contacting the respondent to propose the mediation or having the DHC contact the respondent to canvass their willingness to participate (prior written consent for the DHC to contact the respondent licensee must be provided). If both parties are willing to participate, they are required to sign a mediation agreement (setting out the parameters of the mediation and ground rules) prior to entering into discussions facilitated by the DHC. The agreement clearly stipulates that the mediation process is confidential and subject to a mutual “without prejudice” undertaking by both parties.
27. Where informal conciliation services are offered, the complainant is advised that the DHC can contact the respondent confidentially and discuss the complainant’s concerns with the goal of achieving a resolution to the complaint through shuttle diplomacy. Where such an intervention occurs, both the complainant and respondent are advised that the DHC is not acting as the complainant’s counsel, advocate or representative, but rather as an impartial go-between to facilitate constructive dialogue between the parties and try to resolve their issues. When a complainant requests such an intervention, written consent must be provided before the DHC contacts the respondent. Depending on the nature of the complaint and the parties involved, a conciliation agreement is sometimes executed to set out the ground-rules for the conciliation process.
28. Some complainants are not interested in the DHC’s resolution services because they are seeking an adjudicative process to create a formal record of the respondent’s misconduct or they desire a process that includes a fact-finding investigation. Sometimes they decline an offer of resolution services based on a belief that the respondent would not participate in good faith. When a complainant elects to attempt mediation or conciliation, respondent licensees are generally

receptive to the DHC's offer of resolution services. On occasion, however, respondents decline to participate.

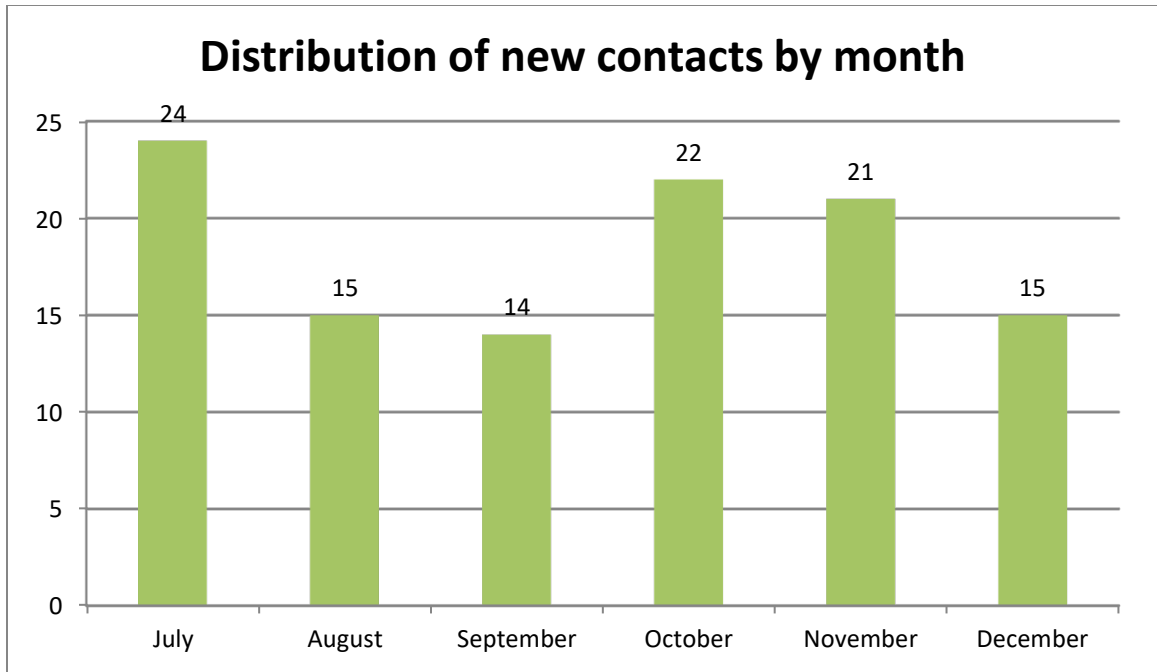
iv. Referrals

29. The DHC refers some complainants to other agencies or organizations where appropriate (such as the Member Assistance Program, a sexual assault crisis centre, a suicide prevention helpline, the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, ARCH Disability Law Centre, or the Human Rights Legal Support Centre). The DHC also directs complainants to relevant resource materials available from the Law Society, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, or other organizations.
30. The DHC does not operate a lawyer referral service.

C. OVERVIEW OF NEW CONTACTS WITH THE DHC PROGRAM

31. From 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023, 106 individuals contacted the DHC with a new matter,² for an average of 16 new contacts per month.
32. The distribution of contacts over the six-month period of this report is set out in the chart below.

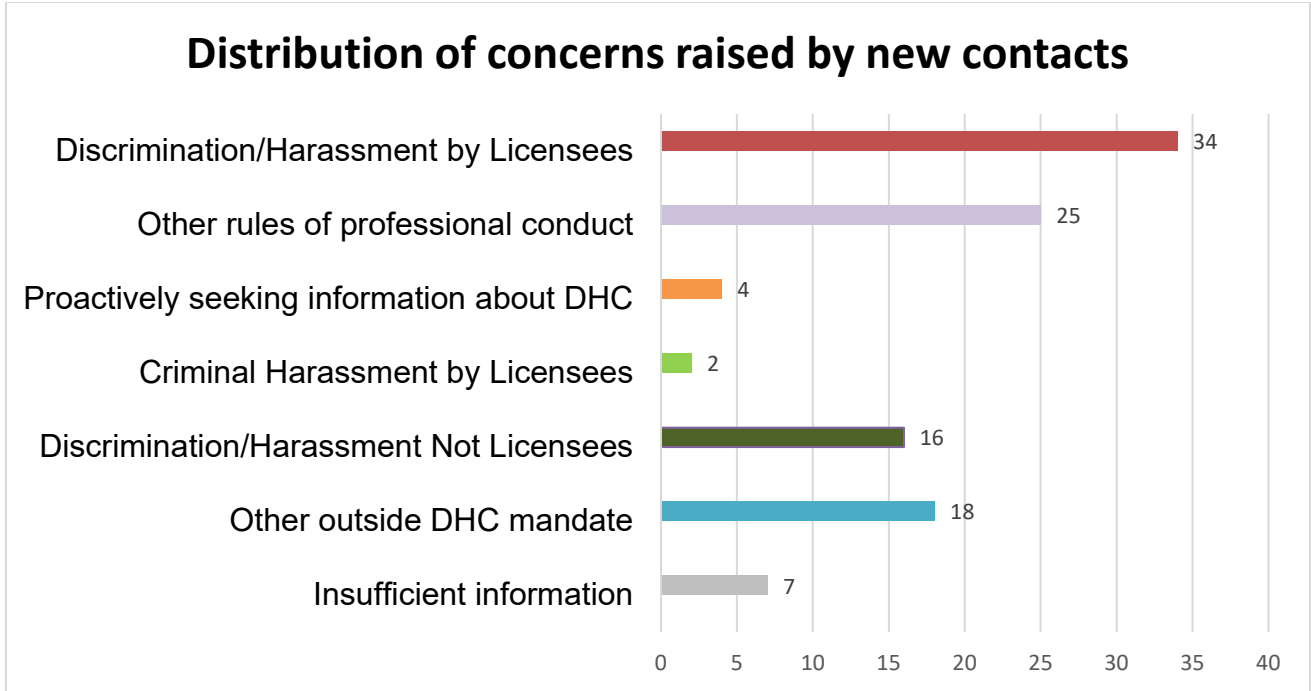
² Individuals who had previously contacted the Program and who communicated with the DHC during this reporting period with respect to the same ongoing matter are not counted in this number. Individuals who had multiple communications with the DHC about the same matter are only counted once.



33. During this reporting period, one new contact requested services in French.

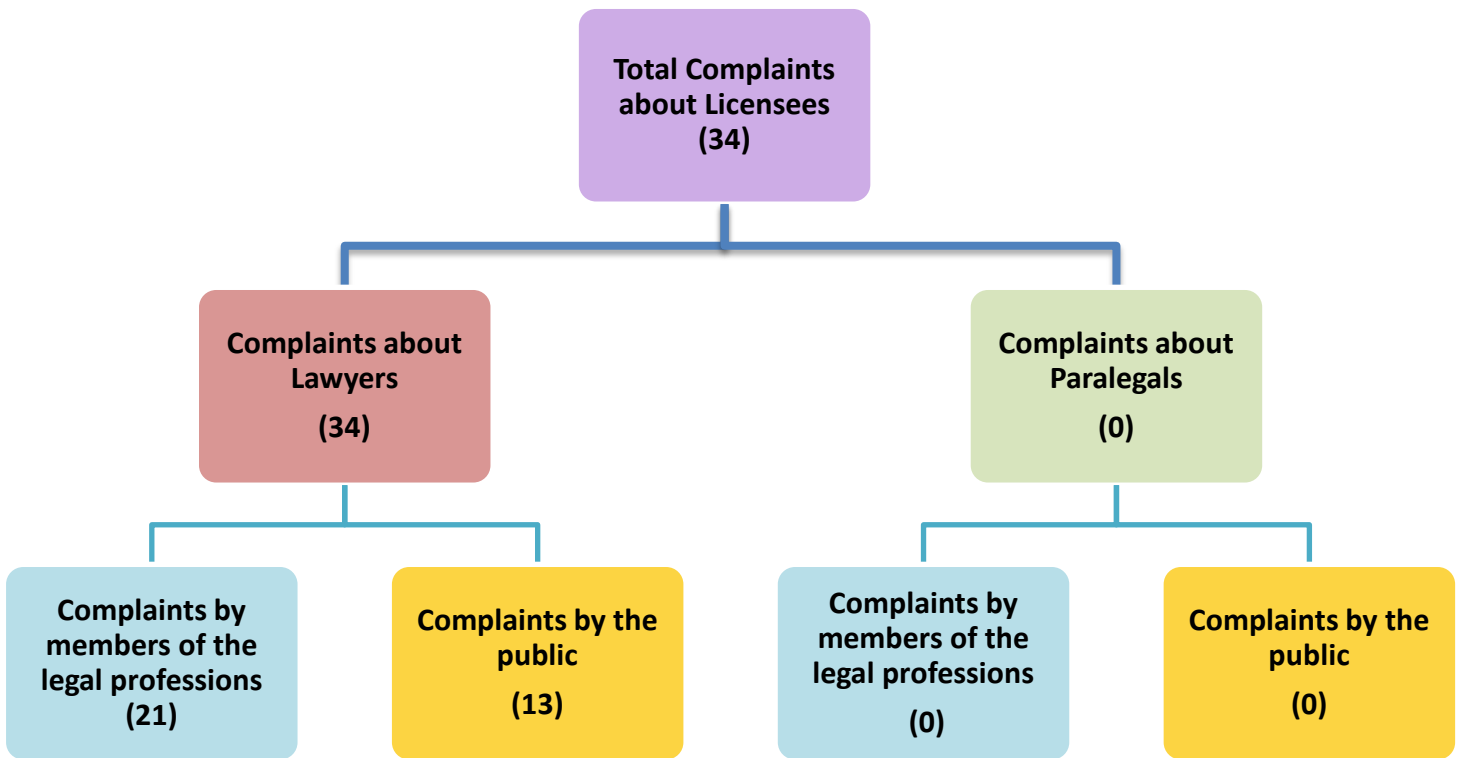
D. SUMMARY OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS

34. Of the 106 new contacts with the Program during this period, 34 raised substantive concerns about discrimination and/or harassment by licensees. A further 25 contacts raised substantive concerns about licensees' conduct in relation to other duties of professional responsibility. Four contacts reached out to the DHC proactively seeking information to assist in problem-solving, and two raised issues of criminal harassment by licensees. There were 16 new contacts raising discrimination and harassment complaints in contexts not involving licensees and seven contacts did not provide sufficient information to assess. The remaining 18 contacts dealt with other issues outside the mandate of the DHC. The distribution of concerns is represented in the graph below:



- 35. All 34 contacts that raised concerns about discrimination and harassment by licensees related to conduct by lawyers. No complaints of discrimination or harassment were raised regarding paralegals.
- 36. Of the 34 complaints about lawyers, 13 were made by members of the public, and 21 were made by individuals within the legal professions. The breakdown of complaints made about licensees is represented on the chart on the next page.

Source of Complaints Against Licensees – Chart 1



Complaints about Lawyers by Members of the Legal Profession

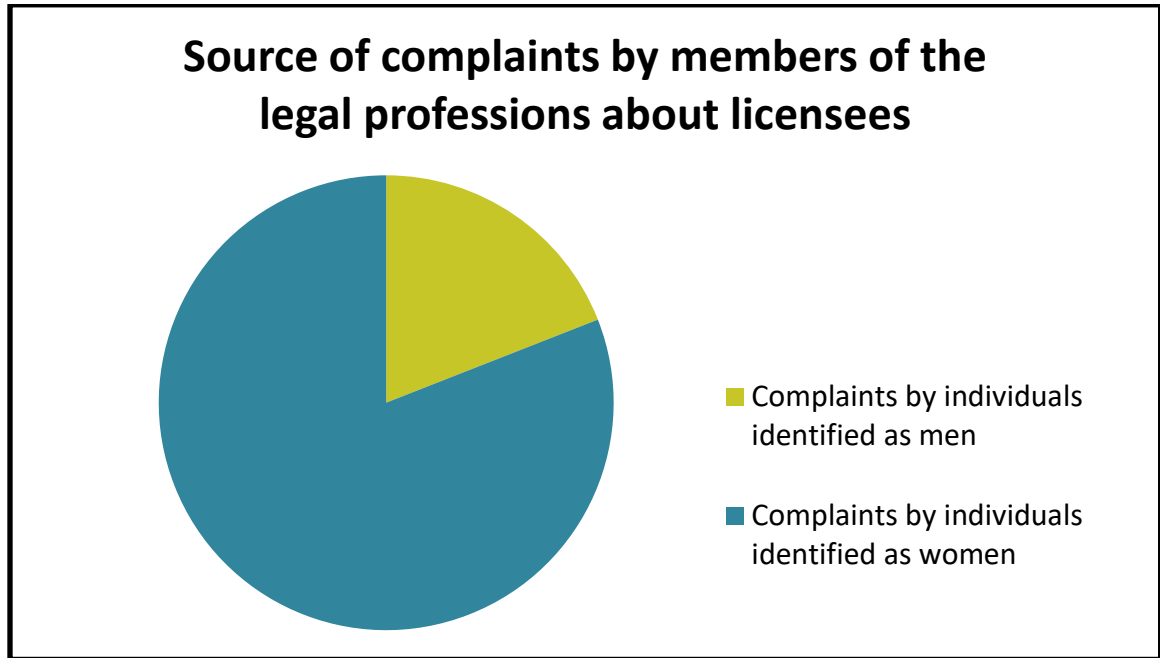
37. The 21 complaints about lawyers that were made by members of the legal profession were made by individuals with a variety of careers/career stages within the profession and a variety of roles within the justice system as follows:

- 14 complaints by lawyers;
- 5 by students,
- 1 by a paralegal; and
- 1 by legal staff.

38. Of the 21 complaints against lawyers made by members of the legal profession:

17 (81%) were made by individuals who identified as women, 7 of whom (41%) voluntarily self-identified as racialized women and/or women with disabilities;

4 (19%) were made by individuals who identified as men, 100% of whom identified as being marginalized due to race, religion, sexual orientation and/or disability.

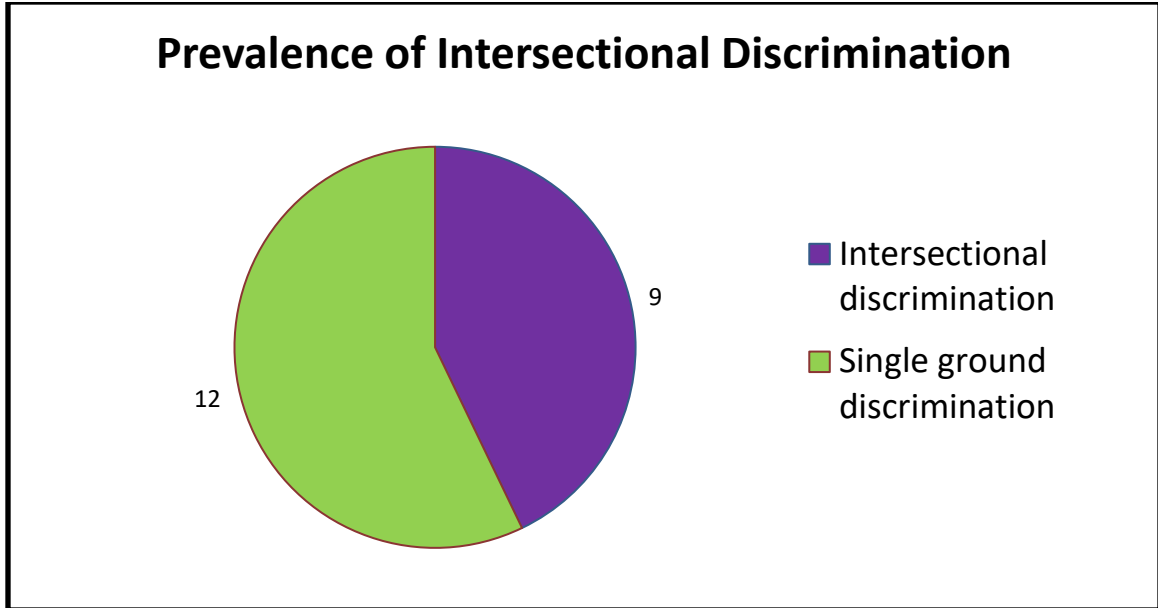


39. Of the 21 complaints from members of the legal profession, 17 complaints (81%) related to the complainants' employment and the remaining 4 complaints (19%) related to interactions with lawyers in other professional contexts.

40. Of the 21 complaints from members of the legal profession:

9 complaints (43%) raised allegations of harassment and discrimination on intersecting grounds including combinations of sex, race, disability, gender identity, ethnic origin, place of origin and colour.

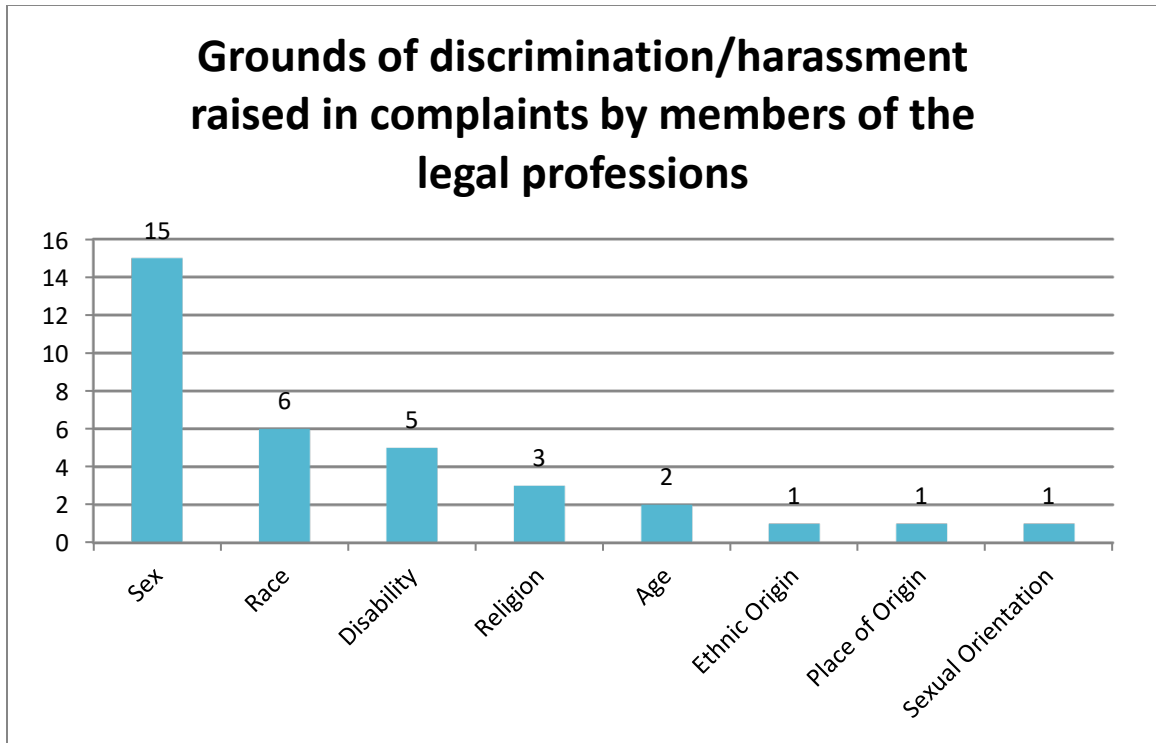
12 complaints (57%) raised a single ground of discrimination.



41. In summary, the following prohibited grounds of discrimination were raised with the following frequency in complaints by members of the legal profession about the conduct of lawyers. The total exceeds 21 as most of the complaints raised more than one ground of discrimination

Sex	15
Race	6
Disability	5
Religion	3
Age	2
Ethnic Origin	1
Place of Origin	1
Sexual Orientation	1

The distribution of grounds of discrimination and harassment are depicted in the table on the following page.



42. The complaints with respect to employment typically involved a power differential (seniority, security of employment) between the complainant and the lawyer complained about. The range of behaviour that was complained about in the context of employment included:
- (a) Sex discrimination included discriminatory and abusive language, verbal harassment, unequal pay, discrimination in work assignments, unequal access to work opportunities, training and promotions, failure to address toxic work environments, and reprisals for raising allegations of sex discrimination;
 - (b) Race discrimination took the form of verbal harassment, unequal distribution of work, and microaggressions;
 - (c) Discrimination and harassment with respect to disability involved refusals to accommodate disabilities, and denial of work opportunities;

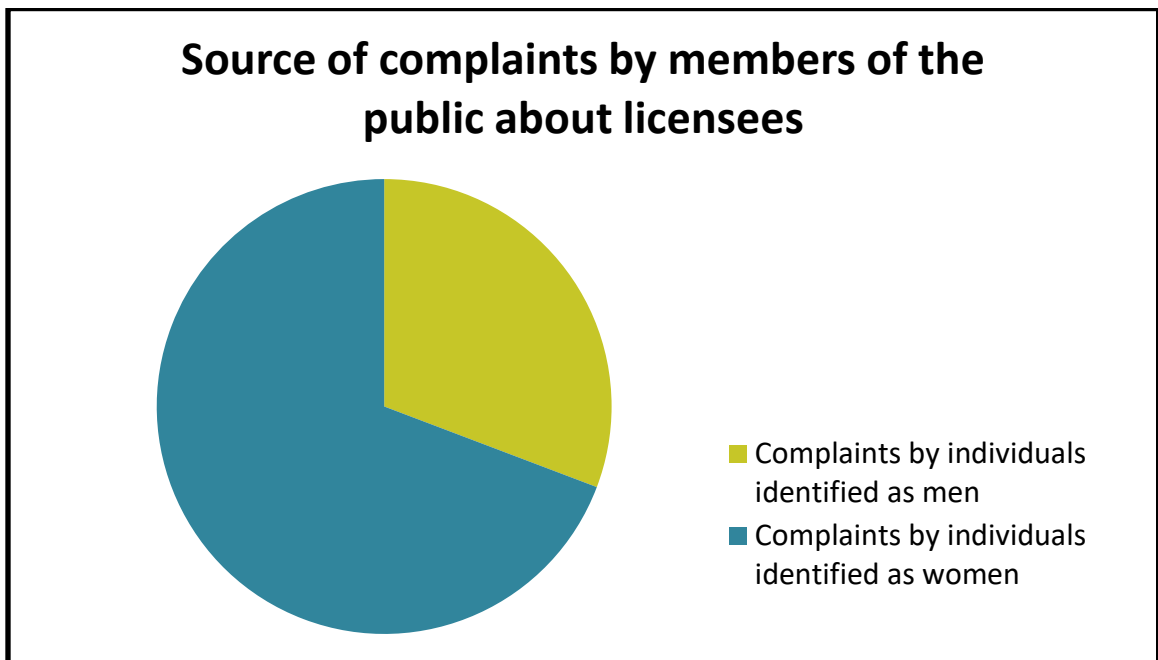
(d) Discrimination based on religion involved verbal harassment and failure to accommodate.

43. The range of behaviour identified in complaints about lawyers in other professional settings included verbal harassment based on race, sex and disability, exclusion based on disability and refusal to accommodate disabilities.

Complaints about Lawyers by Members of the Public

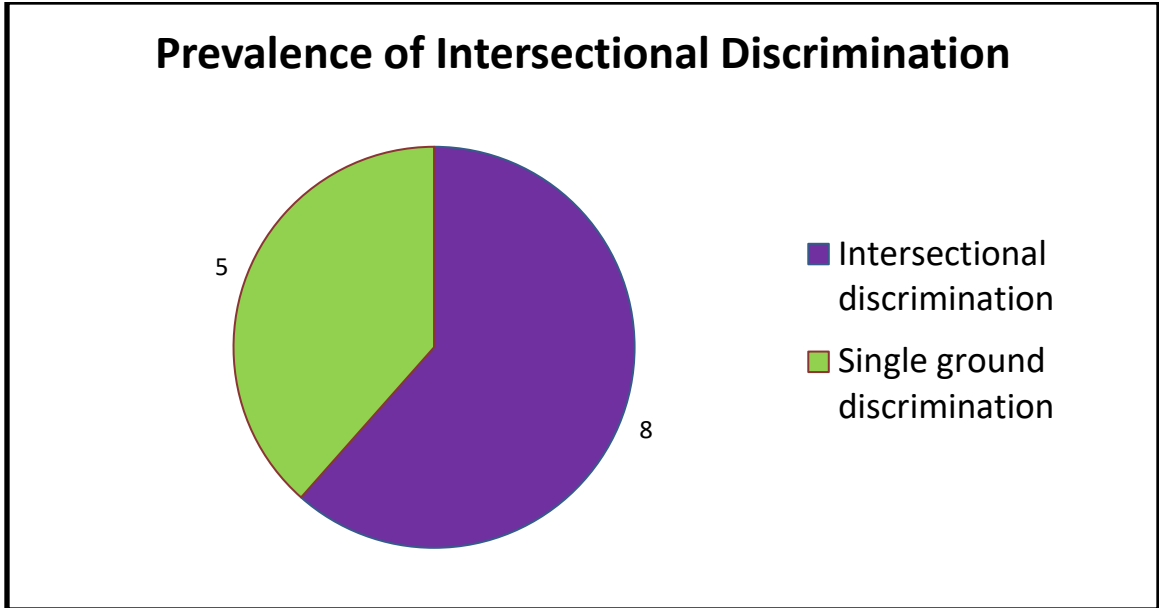
44. During this reporting period, 13 complaints were made about lawyers by members of the public.

45. Of the complaints made by members of the public, 9 complaints were made by individuals who identified as women, 4 by individuals who identified as men.

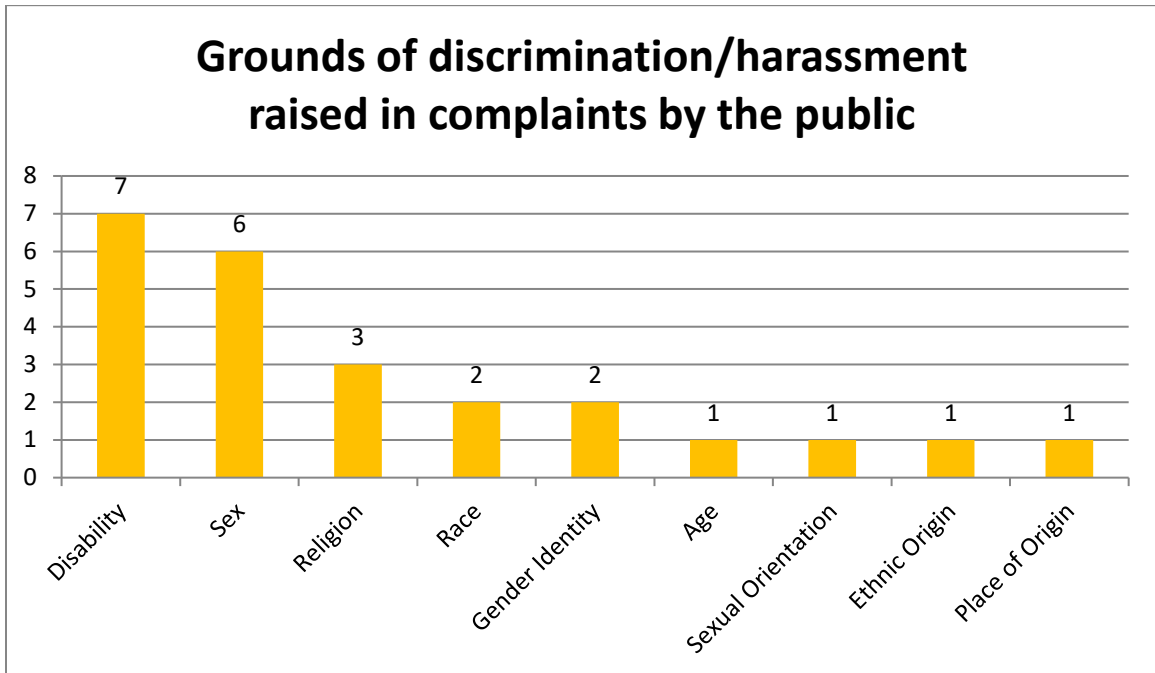


46. Of these 13 complaints, 6 complaints were made by individuals who reported discrimination or harassment by their own lawyer; 4 complaints were made about opposing counsel, 3 were made about lawyers in other contexts.

47. Eight of the 13 complaints (61.5%) raised discrimination or harassment on intersectional grounds.



48. Members of the public most frequently cited discrimination based on disability and sex. The grounds of discrimination identified by members of the public are identified below. The total exceeds 13 because 9 complaints raised multiple grounds of discrimination.



49. The complaints about disability related to the complainant's own lawyer and/or opposing counsel failing to accommodate disabilities, particularly in the context of legal proceedings.
50. The complaints about sex related to verbal and physical sexual harassment. The complaints about religion related to verbal harassment.

E. COMPLAINTS ABOUT PARALEGALS

51. There were no complaints about paralegals in this reporting period.

F. PROMOTIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

52. In 2023, at the direction of the LSO's Equity and Indigenous Affairs Committee, the DHC created the new position of Discrimination and Harassment Educator with the mandate to conduct outreach and training to raise the profile of the DHC and its services among paralegal licensees. Saba Quadri was hired as the new DHC Paralegal Educator and began work in March 2023. The initial outreach is being made to paralegal students who are about to begin their field placement or about to graduate and enter the workforce. The training addresses paralegals' rights to be free of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, their professional obligations to deliver services and operate businesses free of discrimination and harassment, and the DHC's role in providing support in both those contexts. It also provides substantive training on discrimination, harassment, the duty to accommodate and the scope of rights and obligations under the *Human Rights Code* and *Paralegal Rules of Conduct*.
53. To ensure the broadest impact, the DHC training is being delivered at the colleges that provide accredited paralegal training programs. There are 24 accredited college programs across 37 separate campus locations. The DHC has reached out to all programs and, as of December 2024, 16 of the 24 colleges have invited the DHC to provide the training.

54. The DHC training sessions began in September 2023. Between September and December 2024, the DHC delivered 11 training sessions at 9 colleges and already had 11 additional training sessions scheduled for early 2024. All 9 colleges which received the training in 2023 requested that the DHC continue to deliver the training to future cohorts and have integrated the DHC visit into their regular paralegal programming.