



For Immediate Release

May 31, 2010

NEWS RELEASE

Hon. Roy McMurtry announces research results from comprehensive study of Ontario public's legal needs

Toronto: The Honourable R. Roy McMurtry, former Chief Justice of Ontario, released the research results today from the first comprehensive study of the civil legal needs of Ontarians. McMurtry is chair of the Steering Committee of the Ontario Civil Legal Needs Project, an initiative undertaken jointly by the Law Society of Upper Canada, Legal Aid Ontario, and Pro Bono Law Ontario. The project received additional support from the Law Foundation of Ontario.

“This study shows that civil legal needs are a pervasive and invasive presence in the lives of many low and middle-income Ontarians,” said McMurtry. One in three low and middle-income Ontarians have had a non-criminal legal problem or issue in the past three years and one in ten has had multiple legal problems.

“The report demonstrates how Legal Aid Ontario and other major justice system stakeholders can work together for the common purpose of improving access to justice in Ontario,” says John McCamus, chair, Legal Aid Ontario and steering committee member.

Civil legal issues include wrongful dismissal, eviction from housing, powers of attorney, personal injury, eligibility for service, and consumer debt. Resolving these issues can involve the courts, administrative tribunals and regulatory bodies.

Family law issues were seen by Ontarians across all income ranges as important to resolve. Other civil legal needs, however, can be disruptive and long-standing as well, including employment and personal injury issues.

“It is clear from this study that people need help to understand and access the justice system,” said W. A. Derry Millar, Treasurer of the Law Society. “The complexity of the legal system can become a systemic barrier to access to justice. At the same time, when people do seek help, they are generally very satisfied with the assistance they receive from lawyers and other professionals, including paralegals.”

A significant challenge is to find ways to encourage more people to rely on the existing resources available to them. People often can't find legal help because they don't know where to look, or because they perceive they won't be able to afford it.

The study also reveals, however, that fully half of the low and middle-income Ontarians who had civil legal needs were able to access free help or to resolve their legal problems for less than \$1,000 in legal service fees.

One size doesn't fit all. The study reinforces the necessity of differentiating the needs of low and middle-income earners, and of tailoring the responses appropriately. There need to be multiple, diverse, and integrated access points and service responses.

“The value of this report will continue to grow as all three project partners enhance their programs and services for low and middle-income Ontarians seeking to resolve a civil legal need. We fully expect other agencies and organizations who provide related services will find significant learnings from the report as well,” says Lorne Sossin, vice-chair, Pro Bono Law Ontario.

More information on the project, including the full report, is available on the Law Society website at: www.lsuc.on.ca

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