

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Media Release**

### **Law Society launches cutting-edge think tank to retain and advance women in legal profession**

**Toronto:** More than 40 law firms across Ontario have pledged their support to the Law Society's new precedent-setting think tank designed to retain and advance women lawyers in private practice.

Called the "Justicia Think Tank", the three-year pilot project is the first of its kind in Canada, and is one of nine recommendations identified by the Law Society's Working Group on the Retention of Women in Private Practice.

The Justicia Project will include representatives from medium- and large-sized firms committed to identifying and adopting principles and best practices that promote the retention and advancement of women in the private practice of law.

"The level of commitment to the Justicia Think Tank is gratifying and bodes extremely well for the future of this ground-breaking initiative," says Law Society Treasurer W.A. Derry Millar. "We are pleased that law firms of all sizes have shown their support in addressing the realities that women in private practice face today. We hope that this initiative will lead the way for innovative, systemic change in the legal profession, so that we will better understand and reflect the diversity of the public we serve."

Each participating law firm has committed to participate in the project for three years, from 2009 to 2011. Three working groups are being established, comprising: regional firms of six to 25 lawyers; firms of 25 to 100 lawyers; and firms of more than 100 lawyers.

All participating law firms have signed written commitments to achieve ambitious goals in four core areas:

- **Tracking demographics** – Participants will work together to develop a system of maintaining statistical data on the gender within their firms.
- **Flexible work arrangements** – Law firms agree to review their existing written policies on maternity, paternal and adoption leave and flexible work arrangements, and aim to have written policies or templates in place by the end of 2011.
- **Networking and business development** – Participating firms will share information about any business development and networking opportunities they have that are specifically tailored for women.

- **Mentoring and leadership skills development for women** – The Law Society and participating law firms will work together in 2011 to develop and implement various models of mentoring and leadership skills development that reflect what women need and want – and develop strategies to enhance women’s participation in the leadership of the firm.

“The Justicia Project is a remarkable partnership designed to create a shift in our legal culture to ensure women lawyers have practices in which to thrive and lead,” says Law Society bencher Laurie Pawlitza, Co-Chair of the Law Society’s Retention of Women in Private Practice Working Group.

Newly appointed Co-Chair of the Working Group Thomas Conway also points out, “From a business perspective, law firms’ ability to compete for clients and the best talent is critical. Clients today expect law firms not only to be committed to equality, but also to actively promote diversity in the workplace.”

A [complete list of Justicia participating firms](#) is available on the Law Society’s website under the “Latest News” section. [The consultation findings and the report of the working group](#), including other initiatives, are available online.

The Law Society regulates lawyers and paralegal in Ontario in the public interest. The Law Society has a duty to protect the public interest, to maintain and advance the cause of justice and the rule of law, to facilitate access to justice for the people of Ontario and act in a timely, open and efficient manner.

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