



**Fighting for Justice**  
Community Legal Assistance Society

March 29, 2021

**Community Legal Assistance Society Celebrates 50 Years of Fighting for Justice**

**Founded by former Premier Mike Harcourt**

**Vancouver, B.C.** – On March 29, Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) launches a year-long celebration of 50 years of fighting for social justice. CLAS was incorporated as a non-profit legal services society in Vancouver in 1971, evolving from a law student group that offered support to inner city residents dealing with social issues. The Vancouver Community Legal Assistance Society was the first community law office in B.C., founded by then up-and-coming lawyer and social activist Mike Harcourt, who later became Mayor of Vancouver and Premier of B.C. Mr. Harcourt was the first Executive Director of CLAS, followed by the late Ian Waddell, who went on to serve as a B.C. MLA and federal MP.

"Probably hundreds of thousands of low-income tenants, people facing burdensome debt, people living with mental illness and other disabilities, those living with addiction, and other individuals battling bureaucracies or facing discrimination have benefited from our unique service," said Mr. Harcourt.

Six weeks ago, Mr. Waddell, who was looking forward to CLAS' momentous anniversary, provided the following quote: "When I worked at VCLAS with my assistant David Mossop and a very small staff, looking back, it was the best part of my legal life. I remember how innocently, almost, we went into doing a new thing called a class action. We weren't afraid of tackling the big guys, and I think CLAS has kept up the tradition."

Today, CLAS is a nationally recognized non-profit law firm, assisting thousands of disadvantaged people each year with legal help and advice on housing security, income security, workers' rights, mental health rights, and human rights. CLAS has conducted hundreds of test and systemic cases at all levels of court, including the Supreme Court of Canada. It has provided counsel on hundreds of reported decisions in the areas of law in which they practice and is also a resource to advocates, community groups, and lawyers throughout the province.

"In the last five decades, CLAS has helped countless British Columbians advocate effectively for themselves and others. The history of CLAS is exceptional. From the first consumer class action suit in Canada, to so many precedents in Charter and human rights law that set a foundation of dignity and respect for all in our law, British Columbia would be a different and less fair place without the lawyers and advocates at CLAS. Congratulations to everyone involved with CLAS over the organization's 50 years for all of your remarkable achievements in the name of justice," said David Eby, Attorney General.

CLAS provides legal services to marginalized people throughout B.C., offering:

- full legal representation for service and systemic cases, including Charter litigation;
- summary advice;
- assistance to self-represented litigants;
- law reform initiatives;
- support and training for community groups and advocates in the province; and
- referrals to other agencies.

CLAS has achieved justice for clients and others in many precedent-setting legal cases, including:

- ***Chastain v. B.C. Hydro and Power Authority, [1973] 2 W.W.R 461 (“Chastain”)***  
In 1972, this was the first consumer class action launched in Canada. It successfully resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars being returned to thousands of consumers, the vast majority of whom had a low income.
- ***British Columbia (Superintendent of Motor Vehicles) v. British Columbia (Council of Human Rights), [1999] 3 SCR 868 (“Grismer”)***  
This case involved discrimination against a person with a particular visual disability and his right to be individually assessed when applying for a driver’s license. This landmark Supreme Court of Canada human rights decision established the legal test for a “*bona fide* and reasonable justification” by a service provider.
- ***Moore v. British Columbia (Education), [2012] 3 SCR 360 (“Moore”)***  
In this case, CLAS successfully represented a father in his fight to have his son, who suffered from severe dyslexia, receive an equal education. This leading Supreme Court of Canada case affirms every child’s right to meaningful access to education and reestablished the clear test to prove *prima facie* discrimination.

Further information on the above cases is at <https://clasbc.net/our-cases/>.

Today, CLAS operates 5 programs, employs over 40 staff, and has an annual operating budget of over \$4 million.

To learn more about the many important legal precedents, achievements and milestones achieved by CLAS over the last 50 years, visit <https://clasbc.net/clas-50-years-fighting-for-justice/>, visit [clasbc.net](https://clasbc.net) or follow CLAS on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

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