

## **Increase in Provincial Funding to the Community Legal Assistance Society's Human Rights Clinic**

For immediate release

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*Unceded territories of the ʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations, Vancouver, BC.* – The Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) welcomes the provincial government's increase in funding to improve access to justice for people with human rights claims. The additional funding for CLAS' Human Rights Clinic will support our Clinic to respond to the growing need for our services by people experiencing discrimination contrary to the *BC Human Rights Code*.

CLAS also very much welcomes the much-needed increased funding for the BC Human Rights Tribunal (BCHRT), which will help the many people facing delays in resolving their discrimination complaints and address the growing need for complaint resolution as more people become aware of their rights under the *Code*.

Together, CLAS and the BCHRT will have their provincial funding increased by \$4.5 million per year. Consequently, CLAS' Human Rights Clinic will be able to add to its legal and support staff to provide more summary advice, legal assistance, and legal representation to people who have experienced the trauma and hardship of discrimination. The Clinic will also be able to increase its public legal education services to employers and others to help reduce instances of discrimination.

CLAS provides free legal services to disadvantaged people through a number of programs, including its Human Rights Clinic, which helps people with discrimination claims at the BCHRT. For example, the Clinic recently represented an Indigenous mother in a case against child protection authorities, resulting in a precedent-setting compensation award. The Clinic has also won important victories for survivors of workplace sexual harassment and assault, transgender prisoners, children with significant learning disabilities, and many other vulnerable and marginalized clients.

Demand for Clinic services has been increasing steadily. The global pandemic prompted an unprecedented spike in demand for information and advice on human rights. Starting in 2020 through to 2021, the number of people contacting the Clinic's inquiry line increased by 100%, and Clinic staff provided three times the amount of advice to clients compared to the previous year.

"The work done by CLAS' Human Rights Clinic as well as the BC Human Rights Commission has increased people's understanding of when they are facing discrimination. This increased funding will help our Clinic provide more and better services to people navigating the human rights complaints system in BC, including more culturally safe services," said Jacqui Mendes, CLAS Executive Director.

This increased funding will also enable a better response to the significant recent addition of Indigenous identity as a protected ground under the BC *Human Rights Code* to help address specific racism and discrimination reported by Indigenous Peoples. The 2020 report prepared by Ardith Walpetko We'dalx Walkem, QC, "*Expanding our Vision: Cultural Equality and Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights*" identified a strong need for dedicated legal help for Indigenous Peoples, noting that legal advice and assistance are required for Indigenous complainants to help overcome access to justice barriers.

Laura Track, Director of CLAS' Human Rights Clinic, said "For Indigenous complainants to have a fair shake at achieving justice through the human rights complaint process, culturally knowledgeable and appropriate support is needed at all stages of the complaint process, from drafting the complaint to representation at the hearing. We very much look forward to providing more of that support thanks to this increase in resources for our Clinic."

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#### **Learn More:**

- For more information on the CLAS Human Rights Clinic, please visit: <https://bchrc.net/>
- For more information on the Community Legal Assistance Society, please visit: <https://clasbc.net/>
- For more information on the BC Human Rights Tribunal, please visit: <http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/>
- To read the report, "*Expanding our Vision: Cultural Equality and Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights*," please visit: <http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/shareddocs/indigenous/expanding-our-vision.pdf>

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