



“At LSS, we believe access to justice is a necessity, not a luxury. We want our legal aid system to be a beacon of hope to the broader world; we want BC to be a place where the rule of law is real — and achieves justice — for everyone.”
— *D. Geoffrey Comper, Q.C., Chair, LSS Board*

“This is such a necessary service — I have no idea how I would have dealt with the court process if I’d had to do it by myself.”
— *Family duty counsel client*

“Thank you for helping me do in a few minutes what I couldn’t do on my own.”
— *Legal information outreach worker’s client*

“Thank you again for all your time, work, and your advice. I so appreciate all that you did and in helping me to get my life back on track.”
— *LawLINE client*

Legal aid: Making a difference

What if you ran into hard times and found yourself living below the poverty line? What if you needed legal help but couldn’t afford a lawyer? What would you do?

When people with legal problems have nowhere else to turn, legal aid can make all the difference.

Legal aid improves the economic and social health of the whole community and is an investment in a secure and productive future. It is a cornerstone of a decent society.

Legal aid was established to make sure we all have access to justice. This is a fundamental principle of democracy and the rule of law. At a minimum, legal aid works to ensure people on low incomes have the protections guaranteed by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Legal aid in BC

The Legal Services Society (LSS) is BC’s legal aid provider. Every year, we help tens of thousands of people.

Solving legal problems

Legal aid provides low-income people with the services that are most likely to help them solve their legal problems and let them move on with their lives. Sometimes, for example, this means showing them how to use a self-help kit; other times it means giving them a few hours of legal advice. This type of assistance can often prevent legal problems from escalating to the point where people need to go to court.

- Legal information provided in person and over the phone helped people with more than 10,000 problems in 2006/2007 and thousands of people benefited from information in our publications and on our websites
- Legal advice helped people with more than 140,000 problems in 2006/2007. [Evaluations](#) of these services show that:
 - family duty counsel results in an immediate resolution for 1/4 to 1/3 of clients’ issues, and
 - LawLINE advice services make a difference to 85% of clients

In the most serious or complex situations, legal aid may pay a lawyer to represent people at trials and other hearings:

- Legal representation helped people with more than 30,000 criminal, family, and immigration problems in 2006/2007.
 - More than 80% of criminal legal aid cases are resolved without going to trial (usually through guilty pleas or stays of proceedings) (2002/2003 data)
 - 35% of family law cases involve child protection issues
 - 39% of family law cases involve safety issues

A 2006 [survey](#) of 812 family clients whose cases were anywhere from one to 3 ½ years old found legal aid information, advice, and representation services are helping the vast majority of clients resolve their legal problems.



“At court, you stood up and offered your help as a duty counsel, just at a moment that I was feeling helpless and lost. [There are] not enough words to express my gratitude to you.”

— *Family duty counsel client*

“Thank you very much for taking the time and effort to help me with my case. I’m so happy to be in a new home and a good environment to start a fresh sweep of my life.”

— Legal representation client (criminal matter)

More than three-quarters of people in BC agree that governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare, and child protection.

— *Ipsos Reid poll (December 2006)*

“Providing legal aid to low-income Canadians is an essential public service. We need to think of it in the same way we think of health care or education. The well-being of our justice system — and the public’s confidence in it — depends on it.” — *Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada*

Improving access

Legal aid works with others in the justice system to find new and improved ways to help people. Recent innovations mean people can now:

- get legal advice and information at courthouses, at a time when they most need it;
- apply to have a lawyer represent them by calling our toll-free call centre from anywhere in BC;
- get legal advice and information over the phone by calling our toll-free LawLINE service from anywhere in BC;
- find a wealth of reliable online information through our [Family Law in BC](#) and [LawLINK](#) websites; and
- contact a legal information outreach worker at several legal aid offices to help them.

Working for fairness

Legal aid helps people on low incomes from all walks of life. For example:

- Aboriginal people receive about 25% of representation services
- Women receive about 32% of representation services and account for 64% of LawLINE calls and just over 50% of family duty counsel services
- Men receive about 68% of representation services and account for 35% of LawLINE calls
- People with immigration/refugee problems receive about 3% of representation services
- People outside the Lower Mainland account for over 40% of LawLINE calls
- Seniors account for over 5% of LawLINE calls
- People with consumer, debt, income security, housing, and similar issues account for over 40% of LawLINE calls.

For those who are not fluent in English, LSS provides:

- qualified interpreters to help them, in person and over the telephone, and
- publications in several languages.

Filling the gaps

Serious gaps in legal aid for people on low incomes remain, particularly for civil law issues such as pensions, welfare, debt, and workers’ compensation, where services are limited to information and advice.

As we identify new approaches to filling gaps, we test them through pilot projects. Turning successful projects into permanent programs, however, requires additional funding. Currently some of our most effective innovations, such as LawLINE, are funded on a year to year basis.

Supporting the justice system

Legal aid plays a key part in making the justice system work. Without legal aid, the justice system would not only grind to a halt, its ability to operate with fairness would be severely undermined. People whose housing, livelihood, safety, and freedom are at stake would be struggling on their own in a justice system that is already stretched to the limit and often too complex to navigate without some level of assistance.

To find out more, check our [fact sheets](#).