

SECTION 2

lobbying

In this section, you can find some background information about the federal funding of poverty law services, some questions you could adapt to ask your *MP* anytime, or use to challenge politicians during an election, and some suggested sources for further information.

A. How to find federal, provincial, territorial and municipal representatives and opposition parties

Federal Members of Parliament of Canada

To find federal MPs, their contact information and details of reports, elections, etc, check out the federal government web site at: <http://webinfo.parl.gc.ca/>

or contact: Information Service,

Parliament of Canada,

Ottawa, Ontario,

K1A 0A9.

info@parl.gc.ca

Toll-free (Canada): 1 (866) 599-4999

Telephone: 1 (613) 992-4793

TTY: 1 (613) 995-2266

Provincial and territorial politicians

To find your local representative, go to the government home page in your province or territory.

Check out http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/poverty_resources for quick links.

Municipal politicians

<http://www.munisource.org/dal/siteupdates/display.cfm?CountryName=Canada>

B. Questions for politicians about poverty law services

Background information

Prior to 1995 civil legal aid was a service designated for 50/50 cost-sharing between the federal and provincial governments under the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). When CAP was repealed in 1995, the federal money for civil legal aid was rolled into the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) along with money for health, post-secondary education, social assistance and other social services. The change came with no requirements regarding which programs and services the money must be spent on, nor did it require that any funded programs meet any standards of adequacy. Since that time, the CHST has been divided into two: the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and the Canada Social Transfer (CST), and civil legal aid continues to be low on the CST priority list.

This change in funding arrangements for social programs and services has caused a crisis for civil legal aid. Although there are variations across the country regarding the availability of legal aid for family law and poverty law matters, in every jurisdiction people with low incomes now face serious difficulty obtaining adequate legal assistance when they are facing wrongful evictions or the denial of social assistance and disability benefits, or when they need help with immigrant and refugee claims. Often no services are available. Marginalized groups such as women, people with disabilities, First Nations and Aboriginal communities, immigrants and refugees are particularly hard hit by this erosion of access to justice.

Questions

1. Will your party support the Canadian Bar Association's call for an Access to Justice transfer that would provide federal funds to the provinces and territories that are specifically targeted for civil legal aid?
2. Is your party willing to support national standards to ensure that poverty law services funded by this transfer are adequate in quality and coverage?
3. Will your party give financial support to organizations that advocate on behalf of poor people in their local communities?

To find out more

- Submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by twelve anti-poverty organizations in British Columbia:
http://www3.telus.net/bcwomen/archives/ICESCR_Feb_02.html
- A Short History of Federal Funding for Legal Aid:
<http://www.cba.org/CBA/Advocacy/legalaid/history.aspx>
- Information about federal transfer payments:
<http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/cap.htm>
- The précis of articles about poverty law services in the PLANC tool kit