
For Immediate Release

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Media Release

Convocation accepts recommendations to retain women in private practice

Toronto, ON – Women have been entering the private practice of law in record numbers for over two decades. However, they have also been leaving in great numbers, largely because private practice has not adapted to their realities, such as childbirth and taking on a significant portion of family responsibilities.

The Law Society of Upper Canada's Working Group on the Retention of Women in Private Practice presented its Final Report to Convocation on May 22, including the results of its final province-wide consultation with the profession. Convocation voted to support the nine recommendations to enhance the retention and advancement of women in private practice.

The province-wide consultation was held between March and May 2008. During that period, the Law Society held meetings across the province -- meeting with lawyers from small, medium and large firms, as well as managing partners, law students and presidents from legal associations in Toronto, Ottawa, Sudbury, Oakville, Kingston, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Orillia, Ajax and London. Approximately 900 lawyers and students attended these meetings and the Law Society received more than 55 written submissions from individuals and a variety of organizations.

“There was an overwhelming positive response from those attending the consultation meetings. The recommended strategies for retaining and advancing women in private practice are seen as important for the profession as a whole and for the public. Sole and small firm practitioners are the gateway to the justice system for most individuals,” says Law Society bencher Bonnie Warkentin, Co-Chair of the working group that prepared the report.

The recommendations include the establishment of a parental leave program for sole and small firm practitioners, as well as a practice locum service, which are two of the most forward-looking proposals in the report. A recommendation to create the Justicia Think Tank, a project in which the Law Society would work with a group of large and medium sized firms across the province committed to implementing programs aimed at improving the retention of women was also adopted.

“Convocation's support of this key initiative allows us to work with committed law firms to make necessary changes to retain women in private practice and ultimately improve access to justice for everyone in Ontario,” says bencher Laurie Pawlitzka, Co-Chair of the Law Society's Retention of Women in Private Practice Working Group.

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