

March 14, 2015

Josée Bouchard
Director, Equity
The Law Society of Upper Canada
Osgoode Hall
130 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N6

Dear Ms. Bouchard:

The Law Students' Society of Ontario (LSSO) is an advocacy body that speaks for Ontario's common law students (or Juris Doctor candidates). Our membership consists of representatives from the student governing bodies of all 7 Ontario law schools. From west to east, that includes Lakehead University, the University of Windsor, Western University, Osgoode Hall Law School (York University), the University of Toronto, Queen's University, and the University of Ottawa.

As such, in response to the Law Society's call for submissions on the racialized licensee consultation process, the LSSO invited Ontario law students to engage in the discussion. A number of students contacted the LSSO to express their opinions and provide critique. Groups of students at some of our member schools also took it upon themselves to generate their own submissions to the Law Society ("LSUC"), which we encouraged. Among those that did contact us with their comments, a series of themes emerged. These are addressed in the following sections.

Addressing Systemic Challenges

First, the career lifecycle of a lawyer begins with their admission to law school, and the Law Society's strategy for addressing the challenges faced by racialized licensees ought to be as well. A common concern shared by many students was the perceived lack of focus on gatekeepers and barriers to the profession at critical points of entry or transition in the legal career life cycle.

For instance, students suggested that a greater focus on application and acceptance to Ontario law schools would complement the existing goal of reflecting diversity at senior levels of the profession. Diversity and representativeness starts in the classrooms that train future lawyers, not just among the current profession.

As we have insisted in other correspondence with the Law Society, our view is that LSUC must take a broader, systemic view of its access to legal services and access to justice mandates in order to deliver on its public interest commitments. Accordingly, greater emphasis must be placed on the legal career pathways in their entirety.

Cultural Competence

An additional shared concern calls for educating the profession on cultural competency and its importance in advocating for diversity, inclusivity, and progressive change. Students suggested that licensed lawyers have participated in cultural competency training that would promote enhanced cultural awareness and, simultaneously, greater understanding of challenges affecting specific demographics. Such an experience would assist the Law Society to reflect on the equity dimensions of decisions it must take in the exercise of its regulatory mandate.

Continued Involvement of Racialized Licensees

Finally, students also emphasized a need for racialized licensees to continue to play an active role in the LSUC's process on this topic. The consultation process should be guided by racialized members who not only best understand the challenges faced (i.e., through lived experienced) but are most able to provide meaningful and effective feedback. Those to whom this consultation process most applies should be at the forefront of its navigation.

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Law students of Ontario look forward to the findings and strategies that arise from this important initiative. Should you have any questions about our submission, please do not hesitate to contact us at info@lssso.ca.

Sincerely,



Katelyn Scorer
Equity Officer (2014/15)