

Dear Ministers,

I trust that you and your families are well and keeping safe.

I am writing to share my concern with the decision by the Ministry of Citizens' Services not to renew the lease with the Lawyers' Inn Society in respect of the Law Courts Inn at the Vancouver Courthouse.

First, the Law Courts Inn is an institution that provides lawyers, litigants and the judiciary a relatively private place to eat and rest during breaks in, or while waiting for, court appointments and hearings. The proximity to the courtrooms and the relative privacy – compared to the restaurants around the Vancouver Courthouse – cannot be understated. The Law Courts Inn offers a very important and unique service to lawyers, the judiciary and the public of Metro Vancouver, which also extends to other lawyers and residents of BC that use the Vancouver Courthouse.

Second, to replace the Law Courts Inn with offices is tantamount to replacing a downtown park with a parkade. This is especially the case when most are predicting the demand for office space will decrease. The Law Courts Inn is a rare combination of historical meeting place and functional community space, that has both historical and functional importance to the legal community and the public it serves.

Third, lawyers are the only professional service that have to remit PST on their fees. This is money that the Government takes and uses as it sees fit. As a matter of fairness, given the arbitrary PST treatment of the legal profession, the least our Government can do is ensure that the profession is able to (i) sustain a treasured institution, (ii) sustain a space that contributes in a meaningful way to the legal profession in Metro Vancouver (as well as to the judiciary and the public), and (iii) facilitate the professionalism and community that the Law Courts Inn engenders. The Society is not asking for special treatment or a favour in this regard – it does pay rent.

Finally, various lawyers and firms have donated a significant amount of money over the recent years to update and improve the Law Courts Inn. The Society has also undertaken hard work and effort to revitalize the Law Courts Inn, with very successful results. Given this effort and its occupancy for the past 30 years, the amount of notice that the Ministry of Citizens' Services may be legally adequate (I am assuming it is), but it is fundamentally unfair and is exacerbated by the lack of consultation and the timing (during the pandemic). At a time when many landlords are offering concessions, the Government should be leading the way and treating the Society as any other long-term not-for-profit service that contributes to the community.

I respectfully request that you reconsider the decision not to renew the lease with the Lawyers' Inn Society in respect of the Law Courts Inn. It is simply the right thing to do. In the absence of a willingness to reverse your decision and offer an extension, I respectfully request that you permit meaningful and good faith consultation with the stakeholders who use the Law Courts Inn to determine whether there is some other way to save the Law Courts Inn.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Christopher McHardy



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