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BY EMAIL

Sunny Dhaliwal
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Dear Sirs:

Re: The Law Courts Inn

I write to express my opposition to the decision of Her Majesty the Queen in Right of the Province of British Columbia, as represented by the Ministry of Citizens' Services (HMQBC), to evict the Law Courts Inn by not renewing its lease.

I am a past president of the Lawyers' Inn Society, the not-for-profit society that operates the Law Courts Inn for the benefit of the bench, the bar, and the public. It was during my tenure as president that the renovation and revitalization of the Inn was completed in 2015 and 2016. The entire executive, myself included, spent countless hours raising nearly \$200,000 in donations from the legal community. I am confident we can all agree that the renovations resulted in significant improvements that added both beauty and value to the space, enhancing the decorum of the courthouse and, in turn, the public's respect for the administration of justice.

I echo the current Society's President's concerns expressed in his letter to you dated June 25, 2020, copied to me as a past president of the Society.

Speaking for myself only, I wish to additionally communicate my own view: that the Ministry's decision to evict the Inn has the appearance of demonstrating Her Majesty's disrespect for the impartial administration of justice and the importance of the separation of powers under our Constitution.

The Law Courts Inn is the 'Home of the Bench and Bar'; the members of the Society are a complement of lawyers, judges, and others belonging to the legal community. The Inn is an essential physical space where the judiciary and officers of the court can come together not just to break bread in a safe and reasonably quiet space at lunch, but where matters of legal importance can be discussed and debated. The Lawyers' Inn Society's constitutional mandate is to "foster and promote understanding, co-operation, exchange of ideas and comradeship between all members of the legal profession... and to provide a forum for the full and free discussion of all matters of interest to its members."

The Inn has – for 40 years – routinely hosted events of significant importance to the profession, including more recent educational events wherein the sitting Attorney General, the Honourable David Eby (cc'd), was invited as the keynote speaker to communicate important changes his government was making. The Inn has hosted countless other distinguished speakers and leaders from the bench and bar, including the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, PC CC CStJ, at an event celebrating and acknowledging her retirement as the 17th Chief Justice of Canada in 2017. These are but two examples of countless moments and milestones for our profession that the Inn has hosted, providing a forum for communication and celebration amongst members of the bench and bar, a forum that cannot be recreated elsewhere.

Yet, despite its distinguished history and vital importance, HMQBC seeks to evict the bench and bar from its 'home', for the short-sighted purpose of reassigning the space for unspecified office use. The optics are unparalleled: the legislative and executive wings of our democratic government seek to evict lawyers and judges from a space *in a courthouse* that was specifically designed and earmarked for use by lawyers, judges, and the public.

The public's confidence in our democracy is necessarily reliant on its confidence in an impartial judiciary and an independent bar. Without independence, there can be no confidence in fair trials. HMQBC's decision to evict the bench and bar from its 'home' has the distinct appearance of eroding the public's and my own confidence in the rule of law, amidst the Province's apparent capacity— *seemingly at will, in the absence of any consultation with interested stakeholders* – to unilaterally repossess an important resource that supports the health and impartiality of the bench and bar.

I respectfully request that Her Majesty reconsider her decision, and renew the Lawyers' Inn Society's lease of the space on the 4th and 5th floors of the Vancouver Law Courts at 800 Smithe Street.

Yours truly,



Sandra L. Kovacs,
Lawyer

cc:

David Eby, Q.C, Attorney General (david.eby.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

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