

ISFAHAN MERALI

contact@isfahanmerali.com

Region	Incumbency	Slate or Coalition Affiliation	Law Association Membership
Toronto	Incumbent	Good Governance Coalition	Toronto

LiRN Funding and Libraries

Will you support the Law Society maintaining its current level of funding for LiRN, adjusted annually for inflation?

Yes

Do you recognize the importance of the Law Society’s support for the LiRN budget in maintaining licensee competence across Ontario?

Yes

I recognize that LiRN funding is absolutely critical for local law associations across the province. I myself am a member of a legal association and am a user of LiRN so I personally appreciate the immense value of this resource for lawyers. I also know that this is even more critical for lawyers practicing outside Toronto. I have answered Yes to #9 and I add that I must always consider all the issues at the time of any issue coming before Convocation based on the reports and research provided, and consider the comments made during the debate so that my decision is informed and considers the public interest.

If you are an incumbent, do you regret voting to cut the LiRN budget by 10% in November 2020?

No

This Fall 2020 decision was an incredibly challenging one to make. It came to Convocation within the context of the pandemic circumstances where the LSO and Benchers were faced with a great deal of unknowns about legal services in Ontario and while the Courts were not operating fully. At the time, a great deal of concern was raised about the ability of lawyers to be able to pay their LSO fees, which of course funds the LSO and in turn provide the needed support to LiRN. I note also that there were benchers (NOT those running with the Good Governance Coalition) who were advocating for 25% cuts to LiRN, and some lawyers advocating for full defunding of the LSO. It was in the context of these unusual and difficult circumstances that this vote was made and I did so after considering all the information as carefully as possible. I note also that Convocation did, in its very next budget, return and increase funds for LiRN and I continue to be supportive of future LiRN funding.

Do you support offloading funding for LiRN/law libraries to the Law Foundation of Ontario?

No

I believe that this responsibility lies primarily with the Law Society.

Legal Aid Funding

Will you advocate for Legal Aid Ontario funding improvement and sustainability to ensure that being a Legal Aid-empanelled lawyer remains a viable area of practice for the private bar?

Yes

🔗 If you answered “yes”, how?

I am a strong supporter of access to justice, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized, throughout my career. Legal Aid is a vital part of this access and I will continue to support it wherever I can.

Please describe efforts that you believe should be undertaken by the Law Society to advocate for investment in LAO and increased financial allocation to LAO from the provincial and federal governments’ budgets.

While the LSO does not fund Legal Aid directly (it is funded through monies derived from trust funds, and the funds are directed towards LAO from the Law Foundation), the LSO has been a strong and critical supporter of funding to LAO. Some of its important efforts have been through its leadership on the Alliance for Sustainable Legal Aid (ASLA) which has been an initiative shared with other legal associations and organizations including FOLA. I continue to be supportive of the additional and sustained efforts that the LSO has made to advocate for investment in LAO, in particular those set out in the Access to Justice An Abiding Interest: Implementation Update of June 23, 2021. I note also that The Good Governance Coalition includes some critical and passionate advocates for LAO funding including Jennifer Gold who is on the Board of Directors of LAO and Jonathan Rosenthal who is on Alliance of Sustainable Legal Aid (ASLA).

Paralegal Scope of Practice

On December 1, 2022, Convocation approved the Family Legal Service Provider (FLSP) license to allow paralegals who complete specified training to assist clients with certain family law services. The FLSP is to be reviewed in 3 years. Should paralegals’ scope of practice be expanded?

Yes, it should be expanded.

🔗 If you answered “yes”, in what ways, why, and what additional training (if any) should be required of paralegals?

On this question, it is important to note that the LSO recently expanded paralegal scope of practice in family law for paralegals who obtain a special license Family Legal Service Provider license. The issue of additional training was carefully reviewed at that time, and any additional training needed for any other expansion should be similarly carefully reviewed and considered. Currently at the LSO, there is no further expansion of paralegal scope of practice being considered. It is critical that any considerations to future expansion of any practice be reviewed by benchers through the lens of barriers to access to justice, competencies required, risk - and this should be done with a careful review of evidence-based research and always with extensive and transparent consultation. Ultimately, all decisions made by benchers must be made in the best interest of the public.

Lawyer licensees pay an annual competency levy as part of their annual fees that contributes towards LiRN, which funds courthouse libraries. Would you support a requirement for paralegals to also pay an annual competency levy?

Yes

I believe that LiRN and legal associations play a critical role in improving access to legal information and increased competency in the legal field. Currently, many paralegals do not have access to courthouse libraries/practice resource centres (I note however that there are some law associations who do now offer paralegal membership). As a result, paralegals do not currently pay to support law libraries through their annual fees to the LSO. Yet, they are part of providing access to justice in Ontario. While it is important to remember that lawyer and paralegal scope of practice and competencies differ, I am supportive of this type of levy in order to provide access to these important legal resources, as I believe that this improves access to justice and is in the best interest of the public.


Law Association Involvement

When did you become a member of each of the associations you selected above? Which board or executive roles, if any, have you served in as part of these associations? Please list relevant dates and roles.

I have been a member since around 2015. I am a 2022 recipient of the TLA Honsberger Award. I have spoken or participated in TLA panels as well.

Why are you a member of each of the associations you selected above?

The TLA is a vital source of legal update and information which I depend on regularly to provide excellent legal services. The continuing education and library research has been incredibly helpful to my legal work, and has broadened my understanding of key issues in the legal field. The opportunity for connection and collegiality with the broader legal community has also been important to me.

 Federation of Ontario
Law Associations