



# Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

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February 22nd, 2021

The Honourable Cameron Friesen  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
Government of Manitoba

Via Email: [minjus@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:minjus@leg.gov.mb.ca)

Re.: Public Interest Law Center

Dear Minister Friesen:

Congratulations on your new role within the Government of Manitoba. I hope you have had some time to settle in given the very difficult times we are all facing. I am writing today on behalf of a broad and growing coalition of concerned citizens and community based organizations regarding the future of the Public Interest Law Center (PILC).

Since its inception, PILC has been a bulwark for the more marginalized amongst us. Our coalition came together when PILC's stability was put in question by a less than fulsome government commissioned review. This review was then followed by a direction in your predecessor's mandate letter. Minister Cullen was directed to transform support for PILC to secure its independence from government. A proposed option was for PILC to be moved out of Legal Aid and seek charitable status. Such a move would have, in fact, destabilized and threatened that very independence as it would have threatened PILC's security. The coalition's organizational partners are all too familiar with the vagaries of the charitable sector. We submitted letters and made presentations supporting PILC and the essential service it provides to Legal Aid management in September. Some of those submissions can be found [here](#). We were relieved that the Legal Aid management team saw the value of our arguments and recommended securing PILC's future within Legal Aid.

I write today because in the absence of a new mandate letter and the now proposed Bill 50 which speaks to Legal Aid issues without the full text of the proposed legislation and the other proposed legislation without text, we are concerned that PILC is once again facing an uncertain future.

The two most encompassing arguments against destabilizing PILC are:

- PILC's long history of holding successive governments to account on systemic injustices.
- Public interest law must remain publicly funded through our tax system implemented by democratically elected officials.

Our democracy's robustness can only be maintained if it is routinely exercised through challenge. For that to happen, our courts, too often the last defense for the marginalized, must be accessible.

True accessibility must include affordability and free of charge when warranted as in cases that are in the public's interest. This can only be achieved through a service that:


- Achieves a diverse portfolio reflecting the needs and aspirations of individuals, communities and nations in addressing historic and ongoing systemic barriers to inclusion and sustainability;
- Has an open application process with case selection criteria that are merit-based and responsive to evolving community needs and issues;
- Has a planning process that regularly engages low-income individuals, communities and nations facing systemic barriers;
- Is independent from government, political and donor influence;
- Is financially stable, viable and resilient; and
- Respects Indigenous and Euro-Canadian legal traditions and recognizes that they are separate and distinct.

Without such a service, justice is denied to too many, too often.

The pandemic has laid bare the extent of the social inequity that has long existed in Manitoba. PILC is needed now more than ever to address the systemic issues that led and contribute to this inequity. We need a PILC that is fully funded, fully independent of government interference, fully sustainable and fully mandated in legislation.

In closing, we look forward to your timely response given the Legislature's schedule. We hope to hear from you by Friday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of February. Once PILC's immediate future is secured, we would be happy to meet with you to discuss making PILC even stronger and more independent of any government influence. Protection of the marginalized must be central if we are to create a better Manitoba for all. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 204-590-8932 or [kkeehler@spcw.mb.ca](mailto:kkeehler@spcw.mb.ca).

Yours truly,



Kate Kehler,  
Executive Director

CC: Nahanni Fontaine (Opp. Critic for Justice, NDP), Cindy Lamoureux (Opp. Critic for Justice, Liberal), Allan Fineblit (LAM board Chair), Bruce Gammon (Acting Executive Director and Legal Director), Ian Scarth (Manitoba Bar Association president)

On behalf of:  
Abilities Manitoba  
Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg  
Alan Diduck  
Anke Sinclair  
Arlene Jones

Association des juristes d'expression française du Manitoba  
Association for Community Living Manitoba  
Barrier-Free Manitoba  
Bike Winnipeg  
Brad Collett  
Breanna Belisle  
Brianne Selman  
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba office  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Carlos Sosa  
CCEDNet - Canadian CED Network  
Cerebral Palsy Association of MB  
Child Care Coalition of Manitoba  
Circles for Reconciliation  
Communities Not Cuts Manitoba  
Community Living Manitoba Human Rights Committee  
Continuity Care  
Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)  
Council of Women of Winnipeg  
Dr. Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land  
Dr. Lorna A. Turnbull  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba  
Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba-Stronger Together Inc  
Family Advocacy Network of Manitoba (FAN)  
Fearless R2W  
Gisele Saurette-Roch  
HOODFAMS Inc.  
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Inc. (IRCOM)  
Immigration Partnership Winnipeg  
Inclusion Winnipeg  
Independent Jewish Voices - Winnipeg  
Islamic Social Services Association  
Jibril Hussein  
Joelle Robinson  
John Howard Society of Manitoba  
John Sinclair  
Ka Ni Kanichihk  
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre  
Make Poverty History Manitoba  
Manitoba Eco Network  
Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition  
Manitoba Federation of Labour  
Manitoba Harvest  
Manitoba Health Coalition  
Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place)  
Manitoba Possible  
MANSO  
Mediation Services  
Monika G. Feist  
New Directions  
North End Women's Centre - Winnipeg

North Point Douglas Women's Centre  
Oyate Tipi Cumini Yape Inc.  
Peter Koroma  
Resource Assistance for Youth, Inc.  
Restorative Justice Association of Manitoba  
Rosemary Hnatiuk  
Sarasvati Productions  
SCE LifeWorks Inc.  
SEED Winnipeg  
Shahina Siddiqui  
Shauna Mackinnon  
Shelly Blanco  
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg  
St.Amant Inc.  
Success Skills Centre  
Sunshine House  
The Project Group Consulting Cooperative Ltd.  
West Broadway Community Organization