



September 14, 2020

Legal Aid Manitoba Board of Directors
c/o Chair Allan Fineblit
4th Floor – 287 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0R9

Via Email: alfin@legalaid.mb.ca

Re.: The Public Interest Law Centre (PILC)

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing today on behalf of New Directions to indicate our strong support for maintaining the Public Interest Law Centre as a publicly funded organization within the mandate of Legal Aid Manitoba.

The public's interest is best served by public funding. Funding determined by democratically elected representatives of the people.

Turning PILC out of secure and stable funding within Legal Aid and requiring them to focus time instead on seeking charitable status (not an easy status to be granted) and fundraising seems designed to restrict their voice; their ability to speak for the less connected and more marginalized citizens of our Province. It will divide their attention and make them something different, lesser, than they are today.

PILC is held in high esteem in the community for their thoughtful and dedicated practice and their passionate championship of just causes.

In 2010 they joined the case New Directions and the Goekel family brought against the RM of Springfield when the municipal council used their bylaws to discriminate against two disabled men and their right to live within the RM. Bryon Williams and Myfanwy Bowman were critical actors in our eventual success with a mediated resolution through the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. This case and its conclusion took more than 4 years as, it appeared, the counsel for Springfield used every delay tactic possible. There is no way New Directions would have been able to hang on to achieve the eventual non-discriminatory outcome without the commitment of the PILC lawyers to seeing it through. As a non-profit, New Directions needed PILC by our side.

It is because of PILC that three men with intellectual disabilities are now members of the Springfield community and enjoying the more rural lifestyle that better meets their needs.

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It is because of PILC that other municipalities, for example Stonewall, walked back from making a similarly bad decision of using their bylaws in a way that discriminates against a group of people.

And it is because of PILC that seminars and workshops occurred at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities gatherings to educate all councils throughout Manitoba about our case and to ensure their bylaws were written to prevent any discriminatory application.

PILC matters and needs to be provided enough funding to allow the staff to focus on making Manitoba better for all. Please keep PILC's funding within the Legal Aid funding envelope. If you do not, our Province and its citizens will be harmed by this decision.

Respectfully,



Dr. Jennifer Frain, C.Psych.
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Sam Reposa, Executive Director, Legal Aid Manitoba
Byron Williams, Director, Public Interest Law Centre
Kate Kehler, Executive Director, Social Planning Council