



# Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

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432 Ellice Ave, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1Y4  
Telephone: (204) 943-2561 | Fax: (204) 942-3221  
E-mail: [info@spcw.mb.ca](mailto:info@spcw.mb.ca) | Website: [www.spcw.mb.ca](http://www.spcw.mb.ca)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **No Access to Justice = No Justice**

The Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) has been a bulwark for marginalized Manitobans since its inception in 1989. Its non-partisan, independent and evidenced-based approach has ensured that successive governments have been held to account. It is an essential service by Legal Aid Manitoba that must not only be maintained but strengthened.

People 4 PILC is a broad and growing coalition concerned that PILC's stability has been threatened by a recent government commissioned report and a direction in the mandate letter to then Minister of Justice Cullen.

"The review itself was flawed. While praising PILC for all it has achieved on comparatively little funding, it laid the groundwork for moving PILC out of Legal Aid. The idea that PILC would be as stable and able to take on cases that can take years to complete, if forced into becoming a charity, demonstrated a lack of understanding of the realities of the charitable sector and the laws that govern it." **Kate Kehler, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg**

Members of the coalition wrote and presented to Legal Aid Manitoba's management board in September. Some of those submissions can be found [here](#). The management board then recommended securing PILC's future within Legal Aid to Minister Cullen. Since then, there has been a cabinet shuffle, no new mandate letter and now 19 pieces of proposed legislation for March 3<sup>rd</sup>, one of which is Bill 50: The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act, but without any text to explain their intent. Amongst the other 18 pieces of proposed legislation, there are other potential opportunities to mandate changes to PILC.

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.

"Families and youth involved in the inner city and in child welfare disproportionately come into contact with the legal system. We have worked with and will continue to work with PILC to provide system literacy and access to legal supports in the future." **Michael Redhead Champagne, Fearless R2W**

"A strong PILC helps make change happen...change that keeps basic necessities more affordable and more accessible (electricity, telephone, internet) ...change that put a lid on exorbitant payday lending rates.... change that brought a halt to Conowapa...change that brought us rebates on our auto insurance. PILC is a valuable made-in-Manitoba public resource that Manitobans cannot afford to lose, or allow to be weakened!" **Gloria Desorcy, Consumer Association of Canada, Manitoba**

“The Public Interest Law Centre is needed to amplify our voice, without PILC there is no access to justice, to the courts, to change, to human rights.” **David Kron, Disability Matters and Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba**

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**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Kate Kehler, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 204-590-8932 [kkeehler@spcw.mb.ca](mailto:kkeehler@spcw.mb.ca)  
Michael Redhead Champagne, Fearless R2W, [mc@fearlessr2w.ca](mailto:mc@fearlessr2w.ca)  
Gloria Desorcy, CAC Manitoba, 204-998-3707, [Gloria@CACManitoba.ca](mailto:Gloria@CACManitoba.ca)  
David Kron, Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba, 204-250-4228,  
[davidk@cerebralpalsy.mb.ca](mailto:davidk@cerebralpalsy.mb.ca)

**MORE SUPPORT FOR PILC:**

“Without PILC three individuals living with intellectual disabilities would have been discriminated against and not “permitted” to live in a home in the RM of Springfield. PILC’s work on this case caused other municipalities to review their bylaws to ensure they were non-discriminatory and had no ambiguities that would allow for their misuse in the same way.” **Dr. Jennifer Frain, New Directions**

“A strong Public Interest Law Centre is needed to ensure that all people have access to justice. If money or privilege decides access to justice, we have failed as a Province that professes to care about vulnerable people.” **Leanne Fenez – Barrier-Free Manitoba**

“The Public Interest Law Centre is important to me. To me, and other people that may be in a similar situation as me. They give us a voice. They give us help that we need to help navigate the system and the craziness that it entails. Without them it would be extremely hard to find a lawyer.” **Tyson Sylvester – www.lockedoutoflife.com**

“PILC is essential for Manitobans because it focuses on people who need to use the system; all people, especially members of vulnerable and marginalized groups who otherwise have little hope of getting a fighting chance in our legal system.” **Jeannie Alexander, ImagineAbility Inc.**

“The Manitoba Developmental Center is finally closing once and the Public Interest Law Centre’s tenacious attitude and commitment to Human Rights played a critical role in helping to ensure that this Centre MDC will become nothing but a sad memory in Manitoba History.” **Aileen Najduch, Community Living Manitoba Board of Directors**

“The work done by the Public Interest Law Centre touches the lives of many members of the Family Advocacy Network of Manitoba and will have a lasting and impactful effect on our Network. Their work is greatly appreciated and will not soon be forgotten. PILC must be given every opportunity to survive and thrive with the help of the people of Manitoba as they have helped the people of Manitoba.” **Debra Roach, Family Advocacy Network of Manitoba**

“Canada has signed on to and ratified numerous Human Rights instruments. Without fair and equal access to courts of justice, they are only pipe dreams.” **Gisele Roch, CWW, Council of Women of Winnipeg.**