



Law Society of Saskatchewan

2020 Annual Report – Executive Director’s Message

2020 was a year of immense change for the Law Society, the profession and the institutions within society which serve the public and the administration of justice.

Following the Government’s declaration of a state of emergency on March 18, we began the grand, unprecedented and collective experiment of working, meeting and delivering services remotely in a system designed, built and, in many cases, required to occur in-person. At the risk of potentially stating the obvious, finding new ways forward given the imperatives of social distancing was no insignificant challenge for the Law Society, for lawyers, and for other justice stakeholders, particularly the Courts and Administrative Tribunals.

Like virtually every other organization, the Society’s initial aspirations in the first days of the pandemic were modest. We sought to gather our resources, determine what still functioned and put the remaining pieces together in new ways to deliver core services and programming without interruption and hopefully without unreasonable delay.

Once our basic functions were confidently in hand, our focus very quickly shifted to tackling barriers to the remote delivery of legal services. We provided free resources and education to the profession about how to transition to remote practice. Our Practice Advisors, who are always available on a free and confidential basis to our members, assisted greatly in these efforts. So did the Firms’ Designated Representatives (DR’s) who became the conduit for sharing communications and resources from the Law Society with their colleagues. The DR’s were also instrumental in providing valuable insights back, which was (and continues to be) of immense assistance to us in determining priorities.

By March 20, we had established an arrangement with the Registrar of Titles and the Ministry of Justice to enact temporary emergency regulations for the remote signing of most documents, including Land titles transactions and Powers of Attorney, but excluding Wills. These regulations referenced “Practice Directives” issued by the Law Society intended to specify the procedure to be followed. Without having the power yet to issue such directives, the Benchers met on Sunday, March 22 at an emergency meeting, to enact Rule 1143 allowing the Executive Committee a limited capacity to do so.

The first of these directives, Practice Directive #1, was ultimately issued on March 26 making Saskatchewan the first province in the country to provide through legislation the remote signing of documents. Practice Directive #3 completed the remote signing suite by enabling the remote signing of Wills as an emergency measure. Both of those regulations were made permanent on August 7, 2020, increasing access to justice and greatly increasing the efficiency of many legal processes for lawyers and the public. Practice Directive #2, which permitted lawyers to complete wire transfers through their financial institution’s online wire payment services, was enacted on April 16.



Placed in historical context, for these changes to have occurred in such a short timeframe is simply astonishing. It is a testament to the solid and nimble working relationship that we share with the Government, but also the fact that positive changes, which in the “before times” would have taken years, were now occurring within weeks.

As hard as it has been for individuals, businesses and institutions, the pandemic has been an accelerant for progress, not only for the Law Society, but for many, if not most other organizations and institutions. Some potential reasons for this might include:

- Necessity drove invention;
- Urgency forced us to focus on things of value;
- The removal of traditional barriers between justice stakeholders (business cycles, differences in mandate, leadership of the day, strategic differences) quickly gave way to recognition of our interdependence and our collective responsibility for affecting innovation and change;
- The true honour and commitment of the rank and file within organizations to the greater good - in short, the wholesale commitment to mission and professionalism of staff across the justice sector; and
- Need humbled us into accepting imperfect solutions and the potential for mistakes, so long as things were moving in the right direction.

Understanding the many future challenges we may face in the regulation of the profession, my hope is that we will remember these lessons in the “after times” as well.

By the end of 2020, an accounting of what was achieved throughout the organization demonstrated that as a Society we far surpassed the cautious “essentials-only” goals identified at the beginning of the pandemic and perhaps even what we might have achieved during a normal year. The snapshot of our progress and accomplishments as an organization in 2020 are proudly presented in this Annual Report.

I owe a very significant debt of gratitude to my colleagues on the Staff and the Board for their ingenuity, commitment, and hard work. A special word of thanks goes to Gerald Tegart, Q.C., Foluke Laosebikan, Ph.D and Leslie Belloc-Pinder, Q.C. for their steady hands, their collective wisdom and their friendship throughout. If individuals can ever be the absolute right people for a given time, my colleagues on the Executive Committee were those people for us.

Though we are not entirely “out of the woods” at the time of writing, optimism abounds. Vaccination efforts are rolling out and I think we can all see some light at the end of what has been a very long and, at times, a very dark tunnel. So, with utmost sincerity, I hope this finds you well.

Thank you, as always, for your time. And thank you for everything you have done and overcome through these challenging times.

Timothy J. Brown, Q.C.