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**RE: Open letter to the Law Society of British Columbia, Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch, and the Trial Lawyers Association of British Columbia.**

Dear all,

The BC Green Party does not support the NDP's amendments to the Law Professions Act ('Bill 21'). Access to justice is a keystone of our society, and an independent and accessible legal profession is key to achieving that access to justice for all people. This is why we voted against Bill 21, and why we support the legal challenge currently before the Courts.

We have two major concerns with Bill 21. Firstly, allowing government appointments and non-lawyers to take up the majority of the seats on the board overseeing the legal profession is concerning. Under this new legislation, 12 of the 17 directors will be a) non-lawyers, b) government appointees, and c) non-elected lawyers appointed by a group where lawyers are the minority. This majority of 12 will decide on rules about who can become a lawyer, what lawyers can say, punishment for lawyers, and even disbarment. No reasonable person could say this does not weaken or threaten the independence of the bar.

It's important that lawyers work independently from the government; our judicial branch is separate from the executive and legislative branches for good reason. It's crucial that we keep that separation, to keep people's trust and ensure fair access to our justice system. Lawyers are one of the strongest tools the public has for questioning the government and upholding their rights, and even the perception that lawyers are not independent of the government is a risk to our judicial system.

Secondly, Bill 21 missed an opportunity to improve access to justice in British Columbia. We know that 60 percent of people in BC with legal issues did not get the advice they needed, and less than a third of those who did were advised by a lawyer. Bill 21 is unlikely to close this widening gap in access to legal services.

We're also disappointed in the process used to implement this legislation. The legal community was not meaningfully engaged or consulted prior to the Bill's introduction. The full content of Bill 21 wasn't even debated in the legislature, as the Province moved time allocation on Committee Stage debate. This continues a pattern from this NDP Government; of centralizing power, of not listening to the communities that they represent, of foregoing consultation, and of shutting down debate in the legislature. The legal challenge to Bill 21 is one of many facing the NDP - further evidence of their rushed, ad hoc approach to legislating.

So, where do we stand? The BC Green Party supports the legal community's calls for better access to justice and legal services. The legal profession in British Columbia has worked hard to provide guidance on how to improve governance and access to justice, especially with the Futures Task Force. A BC Green government would utilize this report to improve how our justice system operates - to incorporate technology, to explore different ways of achieving justice, and to ensure that Indigenous voices and practices are centered.

We would also allocate all revenue from the provincial sales tax on legal services to legal aid; a promise made, then abandoned, by previous and current NDP and Liberal governments. Last year, despite collecting \$230 million from this tax, less than \$130 million was allocated to the promised legal services. If the BC NDP is truly seeking to improve access to justice, ensuring this money is returned to the legal aid system would be a good first step.

The BC Greens remain committed to evidence-based policy and participatory democracy. The content and implementation of Bill 21 goes against these core principles, and therefore were not supported by the BC Greens. We will continue to work closely with the legal community as we work for a better British Columbia.

Sonia Furstenau



Leader  
BC Greens