YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFO HERE

The Honourable Mr. Tyler Shandro

Minister of Justice Government of Alberta

9820 - 107 Street NW Edmonton, Alberta TSK 1E7

Dear Sir:

I am a lawyer practicing in Alberta and I am writing to you to express my concern about the crisis facing Alberta’s Justice system, specifically our over-burdened King’s Bench Court which is unable to adequately respond to the needs of Alberta families. I am writing to ask you to make this crisis a priority issue.

It is well known that the most significant impact of this crisis is being felt by families attempting to resolve Family Law disputes. The scarcity of Court resources for Family Law matters impacts all other civil court matters as well.

**The Alberta Justice System Needs Adequate Funding**

The profession has been told repeatedly by the Courts that they are under-staffed and have too few judges. This results in long delays for Court matters to be heard. For example, in Calgary the next available trial date for matters requiring 5 days of trial or more, is almost **4 years from now**.

Families should not have to wait such an extraordinary period of time in order to have their matters resolved. These types of delays are unique to Alberta.

One obvious step that can be taken, that has been in place in other provinces for as long as 50 years, is the creation of a form of “Unified Family Court” and implementation of the Reforming Family Justice initiatives. Many studies in this province have universally recommended that Alberta adopt the unified Family Court model. The creation of a system designed to effectively and efficiently address the unique needs of families in crisis has cost-savings impacts across many areas including our health system, criminal justice, mental health and education. The most severely impacted by these delays are children, and the negative impact can be life-long.

The Federal government has committed to funding to increase the number of Judges for Alberta to allow for specialized judges for a Unified Family Court in Alberta. *I respectfully request that this Provincial Government, and you in your position as the Minister of Justice, commit to funding the additional resources required at this time in order to implement this much needed change to the Family Justice system.*

**The Alberta Justice System Needs Adequate Family Legal Aid Funding**

The second key request that I make is to increase the availability of Legal Aid for Albertans navigating the legal system. Albertans need guidance as to their legal rights and obligations to reduce the burden on our Court system. Right now, very few Albertans qualify for Legal Aid, and those that do have very limited coverage. As a result, many Albertans are attempting to navigate a complex legal system on their own and putting extraordinary stress on the Courts’ limited resources. When families cannot get reasonable access to justice services, they sometimes take justice into their own hands. Judges are left trying to manage self-representing litigants – a very expensive use of limited resources – when a Legal Aid lawyer may save everyone a great deal of time and effort by addressing and resolving issues for the client without use of the Courts.

I appreciate that difficult financial decisions face this, and all governments. A properly functioning legal system that can address conflicts quickly and decisively is a core component of a stable democracy. Conversely, a broken and delay-ridden system can lead to other social disruption and is a poor environment for economic investment. I encourage you to treat this Family Justice crisis as a priority for this province.

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Yours truly,

cc. The Honourable lrfan Sabir