



August 3, 2023

Via email: [Arif.virani@justice.gc.ca](mailto:Arif.virani@justice.gc.ca)

The Honourable Arif Virani, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada  
284 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0H8

Dear Minister Virani:

**Re: Congratulations**

On behalf of the Canadian Bar Association, we extend our congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. We also request a meeting at your earliest convenience as the CBA can offer concrete recommendations on issues of mutual interest outlined below. The CBA brings the unique perspective of a network of lawyers with expertise on how the law touches the lives of people every day.

Having been a member of the CBA, you know that we are a national association of more than 37,000 lawyers, Québec notaries, law teachers and students, with a mandate to promote improvements in the law and the administration of justice. The Minister of Justice and the CBA share many fundamental values that direct our respective work in this regard: a commitment to the rule of law, access to justice and the Charter of Rights; and an understanding of the need to uphold the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession. More specifically, a few key examples are addressed below.

**Judicial Vacancies**

We reiterate our serious concerns about judicial vacancies amongst federally appointed courts in our country. The shortage of judges seriously undermines public confidence in our justice system. Civil justice delays drive users with means to private dispute resolution, while adding further strain and indignity to those who have no option but to suffer unnecessarily prolonged proceedings.

We acknowledge that more than 600 judges have been appointed to federal office since 2015. However, this has not solved the gap in judicial complements. Not only are judicial positions left vacant, so are many of the Judicial Advisory Committees that screen and recommend applicants.

There is no shortage of well qualified candidates for judicial office and this deep pool of talent should allow the gap in judicial vacancies to be remedied in a timely fashion. We remain available to

discuss some practical solutions for judicial appointments to be made more quickly, while maintaining the high quality of Canada's judiciary.

### **Administration of, and Access to Justice**

There are many ways to improve access to justice, including the steps your government have already taken to fund public legal education, offer short term funding for refugee legal aid, and fill judicial vacancies with candidates who better reflect the diversity of Canada's population. In our view, publicly funded legal aid is the most fundamental and important access to justice program. We believe the federal government should show greater leadership and financial commitment for all three legal aid programs – civil, criminal, and immigration and refugee.

### **Modernizing Justice Systems**

The COVID-19 crisis propelled the justice system into an overdue modernization and showed we can no longer delay innovations to forge an accessible, user-centered justice system. We note your government's priority to enhance access to justice by bringing the court system into the 21st century, including by working with provinces and territories to make better use of technology and virtual court services.

The CBA also supports the expansion of Unified Family Courts, to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the justice system. We appreciate the government's significant funding for UFCs in 2018 and urge you to continue that direction with renewed funding.

We look forward to meeting with you in the near future to discuss how we can best be of assistance on these and other issues of mutual interest.

Congratulations again. We look forward to working with you and your officials.

Sincerely,

*(original letter signed by Steeves Bujold)*

Steeves Bujold, he/him-il/lui

cc.

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