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October 14, 2016

Via email: mcu@justice.gc.ca

The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
284 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H8

Dear Minister:

Re: Supporting Families Initiative

I am writing as Chair of the Canadian Bar Association's Family Law Section (the CBA Section) about Justice Canada's Supporting Families Experiencing Separation and Divorce Initiative (SFI). The CBA Section consists of lawyers from all parts of Canada who specialize in family law and share a commitment to assisting parents and their children in finding satisfactory resolutions to difficult circumstances.

I understand that the SFI is due to end on March 31, 2017, for both the federal component and provincial and territorial family justice services that the SFI currently provides. In our view, the SFI provides significant benefits to Canadians, and we urge you to ensure that the initiative is renewed with a permanent mandate.

In Canada, jurisdiction for family law is complicated because it is divided between different levels of government and by the inter-jurisdictional nature of many family law issues. The SFI plays a critical coordinating role in the overall family justice system. It plays an important policy role in regulatory and legislative amendments, including updating the Child Support Guidelines tables on a regular basis. It is a major player in preparing and disseminating quality public legal education materials, such as *Step by Step* and *Making Plans*. As practicing lawyers working with Canadian families every day, I can attest to the regularity with which we refer our clients to these valuable, informative materials.

The SFI has helped to develop and maintain family justice services such as mediation, parenting education and public legal education and information. As family lawyers, we know how critical these services are in helping families through the separation and divorce process. The CBA Section supports unified family courts, and we were pleased to see your government's commitment to expand them. Family justice services are an integral part of the unified family court model,

equipping separating families with the centralized information, services and courts to address their problems as simply and economically as possible.

Canadians are more likely to have a family justice issue than any other justice issue. Many attempt to deal with these issues without the support of a lawyer, given the shortage of funding for legal aid in family matters. The SFI has played an important role in providing clear information and easy to use tools for separating families who need that assistance. That role should continue.

On behalf of the CBA Section, I urge you to ensure that the SFI is given an ongoing and permanent mandate to allow it to continue this critical work.

Yours truly,

(original letter signed by Gaylene Schellenberg for Wayne Barkauskas)

Wayne Barkauskas
Chair, CBA Family Law Section

cc: The Honourable Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Finance
Via email: Bill.Morneau@canada.ca