



FINAL REPORT OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE COORDINATING COMMITTEE SUPPORTS CREATION OF A2J INSTITUTE

Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019 (Halifax, NS) – The province’s Access to Justice Coordinating Committee (A2JCC) has fulfilled its mandate and released a final report outlining its work over the past four years, including the committee’s efforts to help launch a new institute that supports access to justice and law reform work in Nova Scotia.

The A2JCC was established in 2014 to find ways to make Nova Scotia’s family, civil and criminal court systems more efficient and effective, less costly and easier to navigate.

“It quickly became clear that despite the best efforts of many working within the justice system, there were still barriers preventing many Nova Scotians from accessing the legal help they needed,” said The Hon. Michael MacDonald, Chief Justice of Nova Scotia and Co-Chair of the A2JCC. “We are proud of the new initiatives the Access to Justice Coordinating Committee has launched and those that were reinvigorated because of the A2JCC’s support and encouragement. Other ideas, like the establishment of an access to justice institute, give us hope for the future.”

The A2JCC was made up of representatives from the judiciary, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice, the Nova Scotia Barristers’ Society, the Canadian Bar Association – Nova Scotia Branch, the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission, the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University, the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities, and a member of the public.

Many of the past and present members were at the law school today to celebrate the grand opening of the new Access to Justice & Law Reform Institute of Nova Scotia, which will carry on the important work of the A2JCC.

“The province is proud to support the transformation of the Law Reform Commission into the Access to Justice and Law Reform Institute of Nova Scotia,” said Justice Minister and A2JCC Co-Chair Mark Furey. “Through its work and research, the Institute will help us modernize our justice system and continue to make it is easier for all Nova Scotians to access and navigate.”

As outlined in its Terms of Reference, the A2JCC was expected to provide leadership for a cohesive and collaborative approach for access to justice initiatives in Nova Scotia; to provide, as appropriate, a forum for engaging the public and public sector participants; and to share information, monitor and coordinate the work undertaken, and educate the public on the committee’s efforts. It fulfilled these commitments through two important partnerships, both launched in 2016.

First, the A2JCC partnered with Nova Scotia 211 to provide a navigator for Nova Scotians looking to access justice, legal and other related programs and services across the province. A government-funded system, 211 is a free service that allows people to call, text or go online to connect them with the public services and social programs they need.

Second, after a presentation from the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, the A2JCC agreed to convene a second phase of the Society's [#TalkJustice](#) project, with the goal of engaging the public and incorporating first voices from people's experiences with justice. #TalkJustice 2.0 began as a six-month pilot project, with the hope of incorporating the engagement tool as a permanent means to gather feedback for government and community justice organizations to draw from when making policy and funding decisions. The new institute has agreed to continue this public engagement work going forward.

The A2JCC was instrumental in opening free legal clinics at courthouses throughout the province. There are now clinics operating in Halifax, Sydney and Yarmouth, with a fourth opening in Truro in February. This model relies on volunteer lawyers and law students to provide support and free legal advice for individuals representing themselves in court on certain types of legal matters before the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal.

The committee also discussed the idea of non-profit law firm that could help address the lack of affordable legal services for those who earn too much to qualify for legal aid, but not enough to retain private counsel. The Schulich School of Law has since included this innovative idea in its most recent four-year strategic plan and has established a working group to consider the feasibility of such an initiative.

For more information on the mandate, goals and accomplishments of Nova Scotia's Access to Justice Coordinating Committee, please refer to the final report, which is available online at http://courts.ns.ca/News_of_Courts/A2JCCFinalReport.htm.

To learn more about the new institute, please visit <https://www.lawreform.ns.ca/>.

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