



NEWS RELEASE

LAW SOCIETY UNDERLINES INDEPENDENT COMPLAINT PROCESS

**For Immediate Release
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Calgary, AB - Recent news articles related to the selection of lawyers to represent the Province of Alberta in tobacco court cases have raised the question of how complaints against lawyers are dealt with by the Law Society of Alberta. The Law Society thinks it is important that the public has a clear understanding of how the independent complaint process works.

“The Law Society is the body charged with regulating Alberta lawyers in the public interest. Our authority to do that comes from the Legal Profession Act,” stated Law Society of Alberta Executive Director, Don Thompson. “We’re completely independent from government.”

Under the statute, the Executive Director is responsible for investigating complaints. The Executive Director does that with the assistance of a number of able staff. The Law Society takes complaints extremely seriously. When complaints are received, they are subject to a stringent investigation. Then it is decided whether there is a reason for having a discipline hearing. If a discipline hearing is deemed necessary, a report of the Law Society’s staff investigation is considered by a panel of three volunteers. One member of the panel is a non-lawyer to ensure the public interest is well represented. The panel makes the decision about whether to order a hearing.

The President of the Law Society is a volunteer position and acts as the chair of the board. The president has absolutely no involvement with the investigation of complaints, the decisions about ordering hearings, or the hearings themselves.

“We’re acutely aware of our duty to the public whose interests we serve. No conflict of interest will be tolerated and furthermore, we owe it to the public to not only ensure our processes are fair but that they are seen to be fair,” added Thompson. “If there’s any suggestion of a conflict, we make sure the person with the conflict – whether that person is a volunteer or a staff member – isn’t involved in the matter.”

The Law Society is committed to serving the public interest. Our independent complaints process is an essential part of our regulatory program.

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