

A message from Bill Hendsbee, KC

2023–2024 President of the Law Society of Alberta

The year 2023 was successful for the Law Society of Alberta, and it was my privilege to serve as President.

As with most professions, new trends continue to emerge in the legal landscape and technology is advancing in ways that were previously incomprehensible. Specifically, the development of generative artificial intelligence continues to make its mark on the legal profession. I am proud of the work we did to be nimble and adept enough to allow for flexibility and growth in this everchanging environment.

This was the final year of our 2020–2023 Strategic Plan, which meant that while we continued to focus efforts towards achieving the current goals, we also put a lot of work into developing the new Strategic Plan that will guide the Board for the coming three years. I had the privilege of chairing the Strategic Plan Task Force, the group tasked with developing the new plan, and it was an exciting process to delve deeper into the strategic direction of the organization. Unlike previous iterations of the Strategic Plan, this time around we involved two external consultants in the development process. This was an effective way to bring new perspectives to the work and avoid groupthink or echo chamber dynamics. The new strategic goals and objectives are also broad enough to allow for flexibility and the continuing adaptability that is necessary in our work, but narrow enough to keep our focus where it should be.

Apart from this core strategic planning work, the Board also made several decisions regarding equity initiatives in 2023 that are important to highlight. First, the Benchers approved a permanent part-time membership status with updated eligibility criteria. Second, the Benchers approved Rule changes that revised the existing active non-practising status to better accommodate lawyers going on leave. It is our hope that these initiatives will represent significant steps forward in terms of lawyer retention and lawyer re-engagement, making it easier for lawyers to stay in or return to practice. Senior lawyers also took advantage of the part-time status, using it as a helpful way to transition into retirement. Ultimately, all of these changes benefit the public by increasing access, reinforcing our core mandate of serving the public interest.

Lastly, we made some important strides in lawyer competence, introducing our new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program in July 2023. Our new approach to CPD provides greater flexibility for Alberta lawyers in how they meet their CPD obligations. There are no prescribed areas that Alberta lawyers must pursue, and the program is designed to be self-directed. I am excited about the new tool and look forward to doing my CPD in the years to come.

On a personal level, serving as President has been one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences of my career. I want to thank my fellow Benchers and the dedicated Law Society staff who worked to implement the strategic decisions we made – it was a pleasure working alongside all of you. As a new Benchers table takes its place, I am optimistic that they will continue to adapt as changes come their way and look for key efficiencies in our regulatory work where appropriate.

Sincerely,

Bill Hendsbee, KC

President, Law Society of Alberta