

Equality Issues Section Report 2017-2018

The Equality Issues Section remains a small but enthusiastic Section. We had intended to hold two events this year, but were only able to hold one. On May 11, 2018, we hosted a round table entitled Towards A More Diverse Profession. This was a follow-up to a session held in 2014 which focused on the equality of women. Our invited speakers were Peter Tonge of Legal Aid Manitoba who spoke about the need for greater inclusion in the justice system of persons with physical disabilities, and Stacey Soldier of Soldier Law Office, who spoke about the issues faced in the justice system by Indigenous persons. Those around the table and on the telephone also shared insights. There were 11 people registered and another two or three who attended last-minute. The conversation was challenging and very insightful and left our Section with several potential projects going forward, as well as strategies for some of the individuals present to use in dealing with discrimination. While grateful for the participation of those who attended, we continue to believe that issues of equality and diversity are core issues that are integral to our work as lawyers and the functioning of our justice system, and we encourage more members of the Bar Association to attend our events and support our mandate to promote equality within the profession.

Some issues were raised at this session that we believe warrant the attention of the association as a whole. The first is the failure of many courthouses and other government facilities in Manitoba to be fully accessible to persons with physical disabilities, whether judges, lawyers, other court staff, accused, complainants, witnesses, or members of the public. The difficulties range from snowbanks along the sidewalks leading to court that are insurmountable by persons using wheelchairs to rooms at the Winnipeg Remand Centre not large enough in which to fit a wheelchair to circuit courts accessible only by stairs. Especially in light of new provincial legislation, the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, this is an issue that we intend to raise further and we would appreciate any suggestions or assistance from the broader membership.

Secondly, an issue with which we have grappled for some time is the need for mentorship for newly called lawyers from foreign jurisdictions who are newcomers to Canada, often racialized, and may be operating sole practices out of a lack of other options and with limited or no mentorship. Anecdotally, many of our members and guests at our events have noted this as being a concern, and we would again appreciate any ideas as to how best to approach it.

Besides this session, the Chair, myself, participated in conference calls over the past year with Equality Section presidents of Bar Associations from across the country. I found these calls to be invaluable in that I got to hear what other Sections are doing and how they are tackling issues that we face. For example, I plan to have further discussions with the Ontario chapter about its approach to racial profiling.

As a smaller Section, we try to work together with other Sections whenever possible, and may be approaching some of them over the summer and into the fall with some of our ideas in the hopes that we can have joint sessions. We would like to have at least two

events yearly and are working towards that goal. We also hope to do some outreach with the Robson Hall Faculty of Law.

I would like to thank the other members of the executive, Meghan Menzies, Susan Benning, and Elizabeth Mitchell, for their invaluable help, support, and great ideas and energy. Elizabeth will be leaving us at the end of June and we are sad to see her go and wish her well. New members are always welcome! I also thank the MBA staff for their ongoing support and suggestions.

Submitted by,
Zilla Jones, Chair, MBA Equality Issues Section