

July 27, 2010

To: VALL Members

Re: B.C. Courthouse Library Subscriptions

Subscribers to the BC Legislative Digest and the Canada Legislative Index received notice recently that the BC Courthouse Library will no longer publish the Digest and the Index. Concerned about the impact of this action on the BC legal community, the VALL Executive decided to invite the senior directors of the BC Courthouse Library to our next executive meeting to discuss the future of the Digest and the Index. Johanne Blenken, the Executive Director of the Courthouse Library and Drew Jackson, the Director of Client Services graciously accepted our invitation and attended our meeting on July 21<sup>st</sup>.

The basis of the Courthouse Library decision is that, in a time of serious financial uncertainties, they feel that subscriptions to the Digest and Index do not justify the cost of publication. The number of subscriptions has dropped, while the staffing required to maintain the publications has not changed, and funding has stagnated. In addition, the Law Foundation (the largest funding source to the Courthouse Library) has been favouring funding for resources and services that primarily benefit the public.

The VALL Executive recognizes the financial pressures under which the Courthouse Library currently operates. Nevertheless, the executive is concerned that discontinuing the Digest and the Index will leave an otherwise unsupported gap in legislative research tools. The executive is particularly concerned about the title index, the "Advance" current awareness emails and the bills pages, in that order. The Digest and Index are one-stop-shopping tools for both archival work and current work. Both publications are relatively easy and quick to use, compared to piecing together information from other sources. It is arguable that the public receives an indirect benefit from both publications, whether from the efficiency for the experienced law librarian which reduces costs to the client or from the ease of use for the public library reference librarian or junior legal researcher. Experienced legal researchers will still be able to untangle the mysteries of legislation eventually, but the less experienced user will be at a distinct disadvantage.

During the meeting, various options to continue publication of the Digest and the Index were discussed, including, in no particular order:

- publication by or collaboration with a commercial, private publisher
- collaboration with the law librarian community, on a volunteer basis
- collaboration with CanLII
- modifying content or publication formats, or both

For background about the Courthouse Library, including recent developments, its mandate and its funding, please refer to the following:

Letter to subscribers of the BC Legislative Digest and Canada Legislative Index, attached

Message from the Director [BC Courthouse Library], July 2010:

<http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/about/MessageFromTheExecutiveDirector.aspx>

“Courthouse Libraries BC: Shifting from Lifeguard to Swim Coach”, The Stream posting by Johanne Blenkin, June 25, 2010: [http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/research/stream/10-06-25/Courthouse\\_Libraries\\_BC\\_Shifting\\_from\\_Lifeguard\\_to\\_Swim\\_Coach.aspx](http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/research/stream/10-06-25/Courthouse_Libraries_BC_Shifting_from_Lifeguard_to_Swim_Coach.aspx)

Annual Reports, BC Courthouse Library: <http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/about/AnnualReport.aspx>

Constitution and Bylaws, BC Courthouse Library:

<http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/about/Constitution.aspx>

Board of Directors, BC Courthouse Library “Submit Feedback”:

<http://www.courthouselibrary.ca/about/BoardOfDirectors.aspx>

Law Foundation: [www.lawfoundationbc.org](http://www.lawfoundationbc.org)

Legal Profession Act, S.B.C. 1998, c. 9, Part 7 “Law Foundation”: [www.bclaws.ca](http://www.bclaws.ca)

Annual Reports and Financial Statements, The Law Society of British Columbia:

[http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/publications\\_forms/report-annual/intro.html](http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/publications_forms/report-annual/intro.html)

The VALL Executive encourages the membership to submit comments to the Courthouse Library and, as Johanne and Drew emphasized at the meeting, feedback is most welcome. There is a feedback link in the “Client Services” part of the Courthouse Library website or you can respond to Johanne’s “Lifeguard to Swim Coach” posting on The Stream blog.

The VALL Executive wishes to thank both Johanne and Drew for meeting with us to discuss changes at the Courthouse Library. It was a useful and friendly meeting and we greatly appreciate their willingness to meet and answer questions.

Regards,

Gillian Crabtree,

President, Vancouver Association of Law Libraries, on behalf of the VALL Executive