

Annual Report

2019 - 2020



Pro Bono Law Alberta

Paths to possibilities



**Pro Bono
Law Alberta**

Paths to possibilities

Our Mission

To be a leader and valued partner in fostering pro bono contributions by the legal community to facilitate access to justice for Albertans.

Our History

Pro Bono Law Alberta (PBLA) was launched in 2007 as a legacy project of the Law Society of Alberta in recognition of its 100th anniversary celebrations. Consultations were undertaken with representatives from existing and proposed pro bono clinics around Alberta and the Law Society of Alberta's Pro Bono Committee.

Today, PBLA continues to facilitate access to justice by creating opportunities for lawyers to provide pro bono legal services through our court-based legal assistance programs, volunteer lawyer services roster, brokered partnerships on legal initiatives, and more.



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Message from the President

I am pleased to provide this Annual Report for the first time in my capacity as President of PBLA. In May of 2019, we received the very happy news that our then President, Kevin Feth QC, had been elevated to the Bench and appointed a Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta. Kevin led PBLA in his capacity as Board member and Chair for many years, and his contributions to the legal profession and PBLA cannot be overstated. On behalf of the Board, I wish to thank Kevin for his many years of strong and compassionate leadership. I hope to continue Kevin's legacy as PBLA moves into the next decade of change and progress.

As I write this message, we are several months into the global pandemic, and the phrase "unprecedented times" has almost become a cliché. But these are truly times of great upheaval and change, and PBLA is pivoting to adapt and meet the changing needs for its stakeholders. We have the benefit of a lean and nimble operational team and a thoughtful, strategic minded Board. I believe that there are opportunities within crisis, and that the legal profession and Court system will have the benefit of an accelerated adoption of technology. New and unforeseen routes will open up to increase access to justice, and new alliances will be created and grown.

As a result of the pandemic, the difficult decision was made to postpone the National Pro Bono conference, which is now scheduled to be held in Calgary from Sept. 29-Oct 1, 2021. We look forward to hosting participants from across Canada and internationally and providing a platform to bring together the pro bono sector as it adapts to meet new challenges.

From an operational perspective, PBLA had many successes under the dynamic leadership of our Executive Director, Nonye Opara. We are proud of the impact our programs have had, and of our dedicated staff and volunteers. I hope you enjoy the new format for our Annual Report. PBLA has matured into its "teenage years" with a new office, communications strategy, new staff and Board members, and the energy to explore new initiatives and build on strategic alliances. On behalf of my fellow directors and staff of PBLA, thank you for your commitment to our successes this year. I look forward to working with you all as we navigate the year ahead.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Fellowes'.

Karen Fellowes, QC
President

Message from the Executive Director

It was a year of change and challenges, one that required our organization to unlearn, relearn, and embrace new ways of doing. We survived – through the resilience and extraordinary work of staff, outstanding engagement from our Board, unwavering support from funders and donors, and the amazing contributions of volunteers. In 2019-2020, we continued to action our mission to promote pro bono engagement by the legal profession through programmatic vehicles of engagement, outreach and advocacy, brokered partnerships, and contributing to broader access to justice initiatives at municipal, provincial and national levels.

Behind each of the nearly 6,000 individuals that received assistance through our Civil Claims Duty Counsel Project and Queen's Bench Court Assistance Program is a person whose life was made better because a lawyer, articling student or law student, including internationally-trained legal professionals, chose to share their expertise and time. For the many non-profits and charities with legal issues beyond their internal capacity and budgets, like Cerebral Palsy Kids and Families whose program documents were vetted by a volunteer lawyer, our Volunteer Lawyer Services Roster Program continues to be a valuable resource. Our program outputs are just one of many attestations of the impact of pro bono service and the giving disposition of the legal profession in Alberta.

We appreciate law firms, sole-practitioners, in-house and government legal departments across Alberta, who incentivise pro bono engagement by their employees and go the extra mile to invest their dollars in pro bono programs and initiatives. Thank you for showing

leadership in the movement to increase business involvement in access to justice. We are grateful to our community partners, especially pro bono clinics and law student organizations – your support and commitment to bridging the justice gap buoys and inspires us. The invaluable financial support of our funders – the Law Society of Alberta, Alberta Law Foundation and the United Way of Calgary and Area, keeps our engines running, in addition to the generous contributions of our individual and corporate donors.

I am privileged to work with a dedicated and hardworking staff, together with Board members that are passionate about PBLA's mission and access to justice. As we head into an uncertain future, some things remain unchanged - the need for greater access to justice for low-income and vulnerable populations and PBLA's commitment to working with the legal profession and community in creating and enhancing opportunities for pro bono service delivery. Access to justice is crucial to health, safety, and stability. As our cities and the world heal in the coming months, we all have something to offer – time, talent and resources that can make a difference in our communities. The gift of free legal assistance is one that keeps giving, to the giver, the receiver, and the community. So, let us DO pro bono and SUPPORT pro bono.

Together in service,



Nonye Opara
Executive Director

Our Programs and Projects



PBLA runs two court-based programs - the Civil Claims Duty Counsel (CCDC) Project and Queen's Bench Court Assistance (QB Amicus) program. Both programs provide summary legal assistance to self-represented litigants engaged in civil proceedings in Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench in Calgary and Edmonton. PBLA administers both programs in partnership with several law firms, in-house and government legal departments, Pro Bono Students Canada (Calgary and Edmonton Chapters), Student Legal Assistance, Student Legal Services of Edmonton, as well as independent lawyers, articling students and law students, including internationally-trained lawyers.

PBLA also administers the Volunteer Lawyer Services (VLS) Roster Program that tries to match volunteer lawyers with non-profits and charities that have specific legal issues.

Court-Based Programs

Through the CCDC Project, volunteer lawyers and articling students provide summary legal advice, document assistance, procedural information, referrals and other brief services. In the 2019 - 2020 fiscal year, more than 755 volunteer lawyers, articling students and law students provided over 2,850 hours of summary legal assistance to more than 3,900 self-represented litigants with civil matters in Provincial Court.

The QB Amicus program assists self-represented litigants with civil matters appearing in Queen's Bench Justice and Masters Chambers. In morning chambers, volunteer lawyers act as *amicus curiae* to assist self-represented individuals, thus streamlining court processes for unrepresented litigants. The program in Calgary also includes an afternoon "storefront" where volunteer lawyers provide summary legal advice, document assistance and other brief services. In 2019 - 2020, more than 443 volunteer lawyers, articling students and law students provided over 1,570 hours of advice, document assistance, procedural and referral information to more than 1,950 individuals.

To enhance the delivery of our court-based programs and better support self-represented litigants, PBLA is conducting a needs assessment for a potential Document Assembly Support Service (DASS). The needs assessment is an Alberta Law Foundation-funded research initiative that aims to identify the document support needs of self-represented civil litigants in Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench Alberta and technology-based solutions to address them.

Volunteer Lawyer Services Roster Program

PBLA officially relaunched the Volunteer Lawyer Services (VLS) Roster Program in May 2019 to focus on improving access to pro bono legal services for non-profit organizations and charities by matching these organizations with dedicated volunteer lawyers. VLS Roster lawyers decide the scope of pro bono legal services they provide and volunteer opportunities can be tailored to meet the volunteer lawyers' schedule. This past year saw volunteers providing legal assistance with matters such as contracts, bylaw and document review, incorporation, and litigation.



Our Impact

Civil Claims Duty Counsel Project

1,384

documents prepared



601

volunteer lawyers and articling students

1,013

referrals made



154

volunteer law students

3,913

individuals assisted



2,855.8

volunteer hours



90%

of program clients agreed "the assistance they received was helpful in dealing with their legal situation"

Queen's Bench Court Assistance Program

654

documents prepared



357

volunteer lawyers and articling students

1,113

representations



86

volunteer law students

1,966

individuals assisted



1569.8

volunteer hours



94%

of program clients agreed "the assistance they received was helpful in dealing with their legal situation"

Volunteer and Client Testimonials

The info provided was extremely helpful because I was lost didn't know what to do or how to get resolution. Thank you for the info.

— **Court-based Program Client**

Volunteering - giving without expectation of return - is foundational to community. It is a demonstration of empathy and care for others that makes all of us stronger. Thanks to Pro Bono Law Alberta for providing opportunities for lawyers like me to contribute in this way.

— **PBLA VLS Volunteer**

The help I received today was excellent! With this help we may be able to keep our home and continue in our community.

— **Court-based Program Client**





Community Engagement

Calgary Legal Advice Clinic

We held the 9th Annual Calgary Legal Advice Clinic (CLAC) in collaboration with Norton Rose Fulbright, Calgary Legal Guidance, Calgary Public Library, and independent lawyer and phone intake volunteers in November 2019. This event is held in conjunction with the Calgary Public Library's annual public legal information event, *Law Connect* and was featured on CBC Radio. Over 50 volunteers, including lawyers, paralegals, independent lawyers, and phone intake volunteers assisted in making the clinic a success! Through the combined efforts of all the event partners, 74 members of the public received free document and legal assistance. The post-evaluation survey also showed that the vast majority of volunteers had a positive experience and clients were overwhelmingly satisfied with the service.

Collaboration in the Access to Justice Sector

PBLA continues to foster greater communication and collaboration among pro bono sector organizations in its capacity as steward and co-chair of the Access to Justice Collaborative. The membership of the Collaborative includes Calgary Legal Guidance (Co-Chair), Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic, the Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Student Legal Assistance in Calgary, and Student Legal Services of Edmonton. The Collaborative provides a platform to share best practices and discuss issues of mutual interest.

In January 2020, PBLA hosted the annual Access to Justice Collaborative Roundtable which provided a platform for executive directors, staff lawyers, and board members to share best practices and brainstorm solutions to access to justice issues. The event focused on Indigenous legal services and included presentations on topics such as Indigenous Justice, educating the bar and bench around Indigenous issues, Legal Aid Alberta's Redesign Program, and automated online personal injury solutions.

In 2019-2020, PBLA also participated in the Justice Sector Constellation, and contributed to the work of the Access to Justice and Access to Justice Week Committees of the Canadian Bar Association (Alberta Branch).



G. John Panusa, President of Legal Aid Alberta, presenting at the annual Access to Justice Collaborative Roundtable in Edmonton, Alberta

Pro Bono Outreach and Advocacy



Engaging with our Stakeholders

Our court-based programs are made possible by continuing contributions from program partners, individual volunteers, and other program stakeholders. PBLA continued to engage with these stakeholders and held town hall meetings with CCDC and QB Amicus program partners in Calgary and Edmonton in December 2019.

Promoting opportunities for legal community engagement in pro bono activities and sharing updates regarding access to justice continues to be a major focus for PBLA. Through our social media channels and *Pro Bono Network News*, PBLA's quarterly email newsletter for volunteers and stakeholders, we communicate with members of the public and our partners in the pro bono and legal communities in Alberta and across Canada. We also host a list of current pro bono opportunities from around Alberta on our website.

Celebrating Volunteers and Program Partners

Volunteer lawyers, articling students, law students, internationally trained lawyers and others who volunteer in the legal services sector enhance access to justice for all Albertans and deserve continuous recognition.

Every year, we hold Annual Celebrations in Calgary and Edmonton to celebrate the extraordinary contributions of volunteers and thank our community and program partners. In 2019, we recognized over 100 volunteers in various award categories. PBLA also celebrated National Volunteer Week in April 2019 by highlighting the contributions of volunteers to PBLA programs and other initiatives.



Left to right: PBLA Board President Karen Fellowes, QC, and 2019 Volunteer Award recipients, Michael Thorne, Kene Ilochonwu, Kara Davis, Preet Saini, and Prateek Gupta

Connecting with the Next Generation of Pro Bono Lawyers

Law students play an important role in access to justice in Alberta through various organizations like Pro Bono Students Canada, Student Legal Assistance, and Student Legal Services of Edmonton. PBLA continued its partnership with these student organizations and law students volunteered extensively with PBLA's court programs

this year. PBLA also participated in the Canadian Centre for Professional Legal Education’s Practice Readiness Education Program (PREP) presentations to articling students and exhibited at the University of Alberta’s Public Law Career Day.

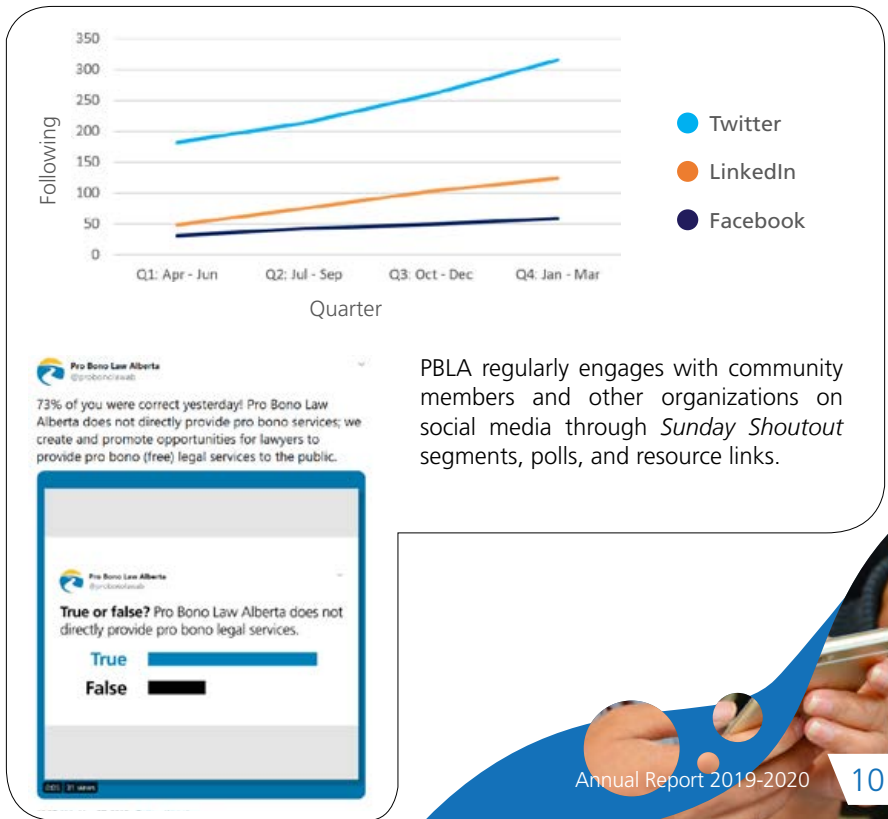
Pro Bono Collaboration across Canada

PBLA participates and supports access to justice initiatives across Canada, and the National Pro Bono Conference is one of such ways that we work with other provincial pro bono organizations. To plan the 2021 National Pro Bono Conference, we recruited planning committee volunteers with diverse skill-sets from different backgrounds and organizations.

We continue to leverage the unique expertise available at each provincial pro bono organization and explore opportunities for collaboration. We also remain grateful for the generous contributions of Pro Bono Canada to the work we do.

Social Media

Launched in November 2018 to enhance engagement channels, our Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook social media accounts have seen considerable growth in the past year.



PBLA regularly engages with community members and other organizations on social media through *Sunday Shoutout* segments, polls, and resource links.



Postponed to **2021**

National Pro Bono Conference

PBLA is hosting the next **National Pro Bono Conference** in **Calgary, Alberta, Canada**. Originally scheduled for Fall 2020, we have postponed the conference to **September 29 to October 1, 2021** in view of ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A heartfelt thank you goes out to our planning committees for their hard work, dedication and support. Hundreds of volunteer hours were put into planning this conference and we look forward to building on these efforts as we plan for the future.

The 2021 National Pro Bono Conference will be held at the stylish Hotel Arts and conference attendees will enjoy a visit to Studio Bell, the home of the National Music Centre, for the awards banquet.

Learn more by visiting the conference website and joining the conference mailing list.

www.probonoconference.ca



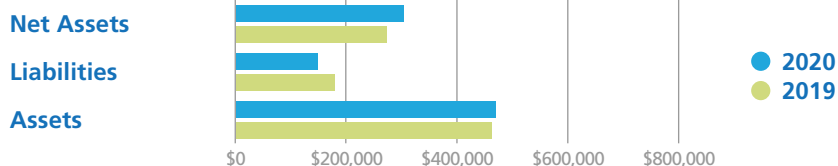


Financial Statements

Statement of Financial Position

As of March 31, 2020

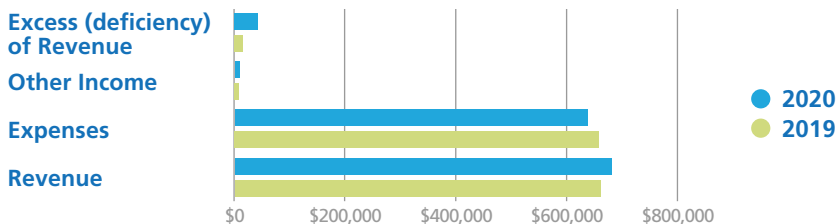
	2020	2019
Assets	\$464,701	\$443,341
Liabilities	\$162,620	\$182,693
Net Assets	\$302,081	\$260,648



Statement of Operations

For the year ended March 31, 2020

	2020	2019
Revenue	\$674,213	\$657,359
Expenses	\$637,933	\$652,698
Other Income	\$5,153	\$5,029
Expenses (deficiency) of revenue over expenses	\$41,433	\$9,690



For a copy of PBLA's audited financial statements, email info@pbla.ca.

Thank You



Board of Directors

Karen Fellowes, QC,
President (Calgary)
as of June 14, 2019

Kevin Feth, QC (as he then
was), President (Edmonton)
to June 13, 2019

Ed Ma, QC, Vice President
(Calgary)

Jana Neal, Treasurer
(Calgary)

Scott Harling, Secretary
(Lethbridge)

Corie Flett, QC, LSA Bencher
Representative (Edmonton)

Brett Anderson (Calgary)

Marija Bicanic (Calgary)

Eleanor Carlson (Calgary)

Scott Matheson (Edmonton)

Advisory Board

Chair: The Honourable Mr.
Justice Rodney A. Jerke,
(Court of Queen's Bench,
Lethbridge)

Bruce Churchill-Smith, QC
(Borden Ladner Gervais LLP)

Cheryl C. Gottselig, QC
(Burnett Duckworth &
Palmer LLP)

Donald G. Bishop, QC
(Bishop & Mckenzie LLP,
Edmonton)

Phyllis A.L. Smith, QC (Emery
Jamieson LLP, Edmonton)

The Honourable Allan H.
Wachowich, QC (Edmonton)

The Honourable John
C. (Jack) Major C.C., QC
(Bennett Jones LLP, Calgary)

The Honourable Judge A.H.
Lefever (Provincial Court,
Edmonton)

The Honourable Madam
Justice J.M. Ross (Court of
Queen's Bench, Edmonton)

The Honourable Madam
Justice M.S. Paperny (Court
of Appeal, Calgary)

The Honourable Mr. Justice
John T. Henderson (Court of
Queen's Bench, Calgary)

Staff

Nonye Opara
Executive Director

Vasil Dimitrov
Program Coordinator
(Calgary)

Rukaiyat Lawal
VLS and Program
Coordinator (Edmonton)

Mirabelle Harris-Eze
Communications and
Development Coordinator

Marilou Stegmeier
Finance and Administrative
Coordinator
as of January 9, 2020

Samuel Wainer
Finance and Administrative
Coordinator
August - November 2019

Lee-Anne Wright
Manager of Community
Engagement and
Communications
to September 18, 2019

Myra Skerrett
Office Administrator
to July 15, 2019

Anah Aslam
Document Assistance
Support Service "DASS"
Project Coordinator
as of January 14, 2020

Ilyas Gora
Summer Student 2019

Program and Project Partners

Ackroyd LLP

A Farber

Anderson James
McCall Barristers

BDO Financial
Recovery Services

Bishop and
McKenzie LLP

Blake, Cassels &
Graydon LLP

Borden Ladner
Gervais LLP

Brenda Strafford
Centre for the
Prevention of
Domestic Violence

Program and Project Partners (Cont'd)

Brownlee LLP	Goodfellow & Schuett Law	McLennan Ross LLP	Parlee McLaws LLP
Burnet, Duckworth & Palmer LLP	Gowling WLG	McLeod Law LLP	Parmar Law
Calgary Public Library	Grant Thornton LLP	McMillan LLP	Pro Bono Students Canada - National, Calgary and Edmonton Chapters
Carbert Waite LLP	Hudson & Company Insolvency Trustees Inc.	Miller Thomson LLP	Resolution and Court Administration Services
CBM Lawyers LLP	Imperial Oil	MJM Barristers	Reynolds Mirth Richards & Farmer LLP
City of Edmonton Law Branch	JSS Barristers LLP	MLT Aikins LLP	SVR Lawyers
Dentons Canada LLP	Legal Aid Alberta	MNP LLP	Stikeman Elliott LLP
DLA Piper (Canada) LLP	Legal Education Society of Alberta	Norton Rose Fulbright LLP	Witten LLP
Emery Jamieson LLP	McAllister LLP	Ogilvie LLP	
Field LLP	McCarthy Tétrault LLP	Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP	
		Parkland Fuel Corporation	

Pro Bono Community

Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta	Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta	Grande Prairie Legal Guidance	Student Legal Assistance
Calgary Legal Guidance	Edmonton Community Legal Centre	Lethbridge Legal Guidance	Student Legal Services of Edmonton
Central Alberta Community Legal Clinic	Fort McMurray Community Legal Clinic	Medicine Hat Legal Help Centre	Youth Law at The Alex (now defunct)
		Public Interest Law Clinic	

Donors

Anonymous (3)	Legal Education Society of Alberta on behalf of their volunteers	The Calgary Foundation
Court of Queen's Bench Justices	McMillan LLP	Harold P. Milavsky Family Fund in memory of Robert Calvert, QC
Ed Ma, QC	Pro Bono Canada on behalf of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP in memory of David W. Scott	William & Toshimi Sembo in memory of Robert Calvert, QC
Finley & Associates Ltd.	Remote IT Solutions	
Hunter Litigation Chambers Law Corp in memory of Robert Calvert, QC		
Law Society of Alberta		

Funders

Alberta **LAW**
FOUNDATION





**Pro Bono
Law Alberta**



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