



MINUTES

Benchers

Date:	Thursday, February 5, 2026	
Time:	12:30 pm	
Location:	Law Society Offices and via Videoconference	
Present:	Kyle Dear, President Ken Mandzuik, KC, Vice-President Carmen Nedohin, Officer-at-Large Kassy Baker Kathrine Basarab Gordon Daman Serena Ehrmantraut Patrick Fortier Jason Gisser Nicole Hamilton Sharyne Hamm	Simon Jack Teresa Jaenen Tehani Jainarine Dr. Richard Jochelson Timothy Kurbis Mathieu Lafrenière Trent Sholdice Leah Unruh Joshua Weinstein Deanna Wilson
Regrets:	Gerri Wiebe, KC, Past President Rhea Majewski	Kirsten Nynych Penny Piper
Guests:	Erin Wilcott	Kirsten Wurmman
Staff:	Leah Kosokowsky Alissa Schacter Sandra Alleyne Noelia Bernardo Pat Bourbonnais Tana Christianson Eileen Derksen	Joan Holmstrom Kelly Kintop Sharon Kravetsky Kathy Levacque Deirdre O'Reilly Sean Rivera Amy Tung

Chris Donaldson
Linda Fontaine

Betta Wishart

1.0 PRESIDENT'S WELCOME AND TREATY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Ms Dear, President, called the meeting to order at 12:35 pm. Benchers, guests and staff were welcomed to the meeting, including Ms Wurmman, Program Coordinator of the Manitoba Law Library Association. Treaty 1 and 3 lands were acknowledged with gratitude.

2.0 IN MEMORIAM

Benchers observed a moment of silence for Arthur Wortzman, Gregory Robert Shane Rodin KC, and Brian Robert Bell.

3.0 CONSENT AGENDA

3.1 Minutes of December 11, 2025 Meeting

Benchers considered the minutes of the December 11, 2025 bencher meeting.

3.2 Report of the Complaints Investigation Committee

Benchers received for information the report of the Complaints Investigation Committee dated December 1, 2025.

Motion: That the consent agenda items be approved as presented.

MOVED: Ms Hamm
Seconded: Mr. Kurbis
Carried unanimously.

4.0 GUEST PRESENTATION

4.1 Prison Libraries

Ms Wurmman provided a presentation on the Legal Information for Incarcerated Manitobans program being delivered by the Manitoba Library Association and the Manitoba Law Library Inc. Benchers were reminded that the objective of this program is to provide access to resources and information to incarcerated individuals who are seeking assistance with criminal, family, employment, and other legal issues.

Ms Wurmman was excused from the meeting at 1:15 pm following the conclusion of her presentation.

5.0 EXECUTIVE REPORTS

5.1 President's Report

Benchers received for information Ms Dear's report dated January 28, 2026. Benchers were encouraged to support the Lawyers for Literacy event scheduled for March 21, 2026 by volunteering or making a donation.

5.2 Chief Executive Officer's Report

Benchers received for information Ms Kosokowsky's report dated January 28, 2026. Ms Kosokowsky advised that the federal government has received a draft report of the audit conducted by the Financial Action Task Force of Canada's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards. The Federation of Law Societies will be following up with government on its request to receive a copy of the portion of the report relating to the legal profession to correct any factual errors.

5.3 2025-2028 Activity Plan – February 2025

Benchers received for information an update on the 2025-2028 Activity Plan for the February 2026 period. Ms. Schacter highlighted several activities currently underway to advance the desired outcomes within the four pillars of the Strategic Plan.

Mr. Fortier was excused from the meeting at 1:25 pm.

6.0 DISCUSSION/DECISION

6.1 Call to the Bar – Oaths and Bencher Oath of Office

Benchers considered a memorandum prepared by Ms Kosokowsky, dated January 27, 2026, which invited benchers to consider and approve: (i) a newly drafted barristers and solicitors oath which was prepared based upon the direction provided at their December 11, 2025 meeting; (ii) a draft bencher oath of office to be administered to all new benchers at the time they take office; and, (iii) Bencher Policy #8 – Bencher Oath of Office which set out the policy for administering the bencher oath. Benchers were also asked to consider whether candidates for call should be permitted to take the Oath of Allegiance at the time of call in the form prescribed within the *Oaths of Allegiance Act*.

Benchers were advised that an official French translation of the barristers and solicitors oath would be obtained if approved in English.

Motion: That the English version of the barristers and solicitors oath be approved as presented, with the French translation to be approved in due course.

MOVED: Mr. Kurbis
Seconded: Ms Hamilton
Carried unanimously.

Benchers were invited to consider whether candidates should be given an option to take the Oath of Allegiance in addition to the new barristers and solicitors oath or if it is redundant given that the new barristers and solicitors oath now includes a commitment to uphold the rule of law. Benchers were advised that the *Oaths of Allegiance Act* provides that its administration is optional but if taken, must be in the form set out within the *Act*.

Some benchers were of the view that candidates should be given the option to take the Oath of Allegiance as a pledge to the constitution. Other benchers expressed opposition to providing the option given that the new oath succinctly pledges a commitment to the rule of law and may send the wrong message given that a decision had been made to discontinue its administration in 2021 in response to concerns expressed by students that the oath may infringe upon religious and equality rights protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Ms Nedohin was excused from the meeting at 1:35 pm and rejoined the meeting at 1:45 pm.

Motion: That the Oath of Allegiance not be administered as part of the call to the Bar.

MOVED: Mr. Kurbis
Seconded: Ms Hamm
Abstention: Mr. Gisser and Ms Nedohin
Carried.

Motion: That the Bencher Oath of Office and Bencher Policy #8 – Bencher Oath of Office be approved as presented.

MOVED: Mr. Gisser
Seconded: Mr. Lafreniere
Carried unanimously.

7.0 MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

7.1 Bencher Survey Results

Benchers received for information a report prepared by Ms Kosokowsky, dated January 27, 2026, which provided a detailed analysis of the results of the evaluation survey which had been completed by benchers in November and December of 2025. Flowing from feedback received within the survey, it was confirmed that all benchers will receive governance training on an annual basis and that it will continue to form part of new bencher orientations.

7.2 Rule of Law Campaign Update

Ms Kosokowsky provided an update on the status of the Rule of Law Campaign. Benchers were advised that at the conclusion of Phase II of the campaign, feedback indicates the campaign has strongly resonated with the public, and with the national and international legal community. The Steering Committee will be meeting with Navigator on February 11, 2026 to receive a detailed presentation and draft budget for Phase III of the campaign, which will propose a focus on educating youth in secondary and post-secondary institutions about the rule of law and increasing press attention. Preliminary plans include hosting an international campaign summit to bring together ministers of education, interested national and international organizations, academics, media, and other stakeholders to encourage collaboration and broaden awareness.

Benchers were advised that \$150,000 has been allocated in the Society's 2026/2027 budget for this initiative. At this time it is anticipated that the cost for Phase III would be approximately \$85,000 per organization (if shared equally), with reduced contributions anticipated from some of the smaller law societies.

7.3 Access to Justice Initiative Update

Ms Schacter provided an update on the status of the Access to Justice initiative, now referred to as the Access to Justice Ecosystem Initiative. Benchers were advised that the Law Society has met with decision makers of key stakeholder organizations (including Manitoba Justice, the chief judges of all three levels of court, Legal Aid Manitoba, the Manitoba Bar Association, the Faculty of Law, the Manitoba Law Foundation) and has meetings scheduled with Indigenous rights organizations (including the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Manitoba Inuit Association) to invite their participation as inaugural members of an Action Coalition. It is intended that each organization will contribute financial or in kind resources to this initiative.

While no decisions were required at this time, benchers were invited to consider two matters: (i) Should the Law Society hold two permanent seats on the Action Coalition, one as co-chair to be filled by a bencher or Access Committee member, and the other to be filled by a staff person to maintain continuity? (ii) Do benchers support funding the salary of an executive director for one year as the Society's contribution to this initiative?

Benchers recognized the importance of creating a dedicated executive director position to ensure that this initiative continues to move forward. It was suggested that consideration be given to funding this position for two years as a longer term commitment may attract a stronger pool of applicants.

7.4 2026/2027 Bencher Expense Budget

Benchers considered Ms Alleyne's memorandum, dated January 26, 2026, which provided a detailed report on the draft bencher expense budget for the 2026/2027 fiscal period.

Motion: That the bencher expense budget for the period April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2027 be approved as presented.

MOVED: Ms Nedohin
Seconded: Mr. Kurbis
Abstention: Mr. Mandzuik
Carried.

7.5 2026/2027 Budget

Benchers received for information Ms Alleyne's memorandum, dated January 26, 2026, which provided a detailed report on the setting of the operating budget for the 2026/2027 fiscal period. Benchers were advised that the budget provides for the practising fee and levies to be set at \$2,745, an increase of \$100 over the prior year. Notice of the new fee assessment will be circulated to the profession at the end of February.

Mr. Fortier rejoined the meeting at 2:35 pm.

8.0 MONITORING REPORTS

8.1 Statements of Operations – April 1, 2025 to December 31, 2026

Benchers considered a monitoring report prepared by Ms Alleyne, dated January 27, 2026, which provided a detailed analysis of the Society's financial operations for the fiscal period ending December 31, 2025.

8.2 Administration and Operations

Benchers considered a monitoring report, dated January 27, 2026, which provided a detailed report on the administrative services and operational procedures delivered by Law Society staff. Benchers recommended that a report on administration and operations be provided annually.

9.0 COMMITTEE REPORTS

9.1 Admissions and Education Committee

Ms Ehrmantraut provided an oral report on the meeting of the Admissions and Education Committee held on January 27, 2026. At this meeting the committee continued its review of the Society's good character assessment requirement for admission to the profession. The committee: (i) considered but declined to replace the term "good character" with "suitability to practice"; (ii) discussed removal of the application question which invites disclosure of any information which might reflect adversely on their character but instead agreed to clarify that mental health information is not being sought; (iii) reaffirmed its decision to require disclosure of non-academic information; and, (iv) discussed continued disclosure of all criminal matters, including charges. The committee will meet again to conclude its discussions regarding disclosure of criminal history and will then be in a position to report to benchers with its recommendations.

9.2 Indigenous Advisory Committee

Ms Wishart provided an oral report on the meeting of the Indigenous Advisory Committee which was held on February 10, 2026. At this meeting the committee: (i) discussed next steps for Indigenous cultural competency and awareness training, directing that the Law Society report to members about participation and feedback received from the profession on The Path; (ii) discussed exploring opportunities for anti-racism training; and (iii) discussed the letter to be sent to the Sinclair Family seeking approval to establish the Murray Sinclair Award.

10.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Benchers were advised that this item will be included in all future agendas and is intended to hold space for benchers to consider emerging issues or raise matters not covered on the agenda.

11.0 FOR INFORMATION

Benchers considered the materials provided for information.

There being no further business, Ms Dear called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:00 pm.

MOVED: Ms Basarab