

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE LSS LAW LINE

1. Q: What is the history of the LSS Law Line?

A: The LSS Law Line was operated for several years a Lower Mainland legal information and referral service through its Legal Resource Centre. In September 2002, the service was incorporated into the Community and Poverty Services Division, and coverage was extended to all BC residents. In September 2003, LSS expanded the service on a pilot basis to provide legal advice to financially eligible callers, in addition to its legal information and referral services.

2. Q: What is the model for this expanded service?

A: There are several legal information and advice “hotline” programs in the U.S. These programs have emerged in the past 10 years in an attempt to expand summary legal services to low income individuals, and as a response to funding reductions for full representation services. The programs offer the advantage of accessibility particularly for individuals who live in more remote locations or who would find it difficult to access a regular legal clinic program.

3. Q: How do services from the Law Line fit in with other legal help?

A: The focus of the Law Line is summary legal information, and summary legal advice for lower income individuals. Callers who may require legal advice must meet LSS income guidelines. The Law Line is not in competition with regular services provided by the private bar, nor is it a substitute for representation services that may be available in criminal, family, or immigration law matters from LSS.

Where a caller raises a legal issue that is not part of the Law Line service offerings, a referral is made to an outside service such as Lawyer Referral or a local pro bono clinic. Referrals are also made to services such as Criminal or Family Duty Counsel, LSLAP, the Law Centre, and other advocacy organizations when we assess that a higher level of service is needed and can be made available from such organizations.

4. Q: How is the Law Line staffed?

A: The Law Line phones are staffed by lawyers and paralegals, who all take direct calls. Staff routinely consult with each other on advice-type cases in order to take the benefit of the various fields of expertise that lawyer and paralegal staff bring to the Law Line.

Law Line staff do not provide ongoing legal services to individual clients. Services to many callers are normally finished with one call, and advice services are normally completed within a week. If a caller wishes future assistance on the same or a different matter, they are required to call the Law Line general phone number and may or may not received assistance from the lawyer or paralegal who previously took their call.

5. Q. What are the income limits for receiving legal advice from the Law Line?

A: The guidelines are based on household size and net income, and are as follows:

Law Line Legal Advice Financial Eligibility Test	
Number of family members*	Annual/Monthly net income**
4 or fewer	\$28,000/\$2,333.33
5	\$33,000/\$2,750.00
6	\$35,000/\$2,916.67
7 or more	\$38,000/\$3,166.67
**"Family members" include a parent or person looking after the children, and the children who live with that person	
** "Income" is the person's net income from all sources, but not including the income of a new spouse.	

6. Q: How do people hear about the Law Line?

A: The LSS Law Line receives many of its calls through its yearly Yellow Pages ad. In addition, callers can find out about the Law Line from various websites, LSS offices, and through referrals from related agencies such as Lawyer Referral.

7. Q: What areas of the law can the Law Line help people with?

A: The Law Line aims to provide services to individuals in most areas of the law, for non-business matters. Historically, the most frequent area of law that we receive calls for is family law. Many calls are also received for criminal, debtor/creditor, residential tenancy, welfare, and consumer contract issues.

8. Q: What ways is the Law Line able to provide services to callers?

A: The core service of the Law Line is telephone information and advice to callers. Up to three hours of advice services can be provided to qualifying callers. That amount of time can be a combination of phone services, as well as document review, correspondence, calls or letters to third parties, and assistance with drafting simple pleadings.

9. Q: How many calls does the Law Line get?

A: The Law Line averages about 2000 total calls per month. Services to these calls will range from quick referral to an alternate service agency, through to advice services of up to three hours.