



[COVID FEE RELIEF AND LICENSING FEES](#)

The Audit and Finance Committee has been considering these and other issues in its planning for the 2021 budget, which will go before Convocation at its November meeting. A related motion in September calling for a 25% fee reduction had been tabled. Don't hold your breath. These are difficult times for every institution seeking to balance the books in times of declining revenue. However, the LSO has lots of options but Benchers must be prepared to make tough decisions that have been avoided in the past. Stay tuned for how Benchers decide to spend our money, remembering we have no choice but to pay to retain our licenses as many colleagues struggle to pay rent and staff in this prolonged pandemic.

[LSO FEE EXEMPTIONS - RECONSIDERED](#)

Convocation has revisited its August approval in principle removing the previous Law Society fee exemption for those who still practice law in Ontario after more than 50 years. The Committee reconsidered the original botched debate and decision after reviewing the numerous letters delivered by lawyers. The fresh Convocation debate was laden with language such as "inter-generational equity, cash grab, you have to pay to play and free ride". In its usual tinkering fashion and just to show us who is boss Convocation did two things to maintain its own cash grab on the premise of cost recovery. It grandparented existing Life Members so they retain the honorary fee exemption first granted in 1959. But those achieving the 50 year milestone as of January 1, 2021 are out of luck and will be required to pay fees. But not quite so easy for those over 65 who are no longer practicing. A new fee category has been coined to charge 10 per cent of the annual fee for retired lawyers who wish to appear on the LSO site as "license surrendered-retired".

[NEW CHAIR OF THE LAW SOCIETY TRIBUNAL - MALCOM MERCER](#)

Yes, that Malcolm Mercer has been appointed to a 4 year term as only the second full time Chair, succeeding David Wright. Mr. Mercer has been a practicing lawyer

for 35 years and was elected as a Bencher in 2011 and served as Treasurer from 2018 to 2020. The Law Society expects you to accept that following a robust public search, Mr. Mercer was the best candidate and has been appointed to the position by the same Benchers who elected him as Treasurer in 2019. Naturally, he understands that the Tribunal populated mostly by licensees who happen to be Benchers, is an autonomous adjudicative body entirely independent of the Law Society. However, he will sit as an ex officio member, on the LSO Tribunal Committee with Benchers also appointed by Convocation. Mr. Mercer is paid by the Law Society which exercises a degree of control through its Tribunal Committee that develops policy options for Convocation approval relating to administration and operations of the Tribunal.

Mr. Mercer's forthcoming substantive hearing decisions and administrative work must ensure that there is a truly transparent hearing process that is fair and effective for all.

[CONTINGENCY FEES REFORM NOW HERE](#)

The Law Society supported by the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association and other groups have been working on this since 2015. The significant reforms provide that costs can now be included in the amount on which a contingency fee is based; includes a direction on what can and cannot be charged to clients as disbursements and requires use of a standard form contingency fee agreement, except where the client is a sophisticated client or the court approves the fee or the agreement. The new agreement represents a plain language, straight forward explanation of the client relationship. The package of changes are intended to enhance access to justice and fair competition among lawyers for the benefit of clients. A standard form consumer guide is expected to make it easier for clients to learn about and understand their rights and responsibilities before entering into a fee arrangement. Lawyers will need to ensure that the documents are reviewed in the language that can be understood by clients. Convocation must now amend the Rules of Conduct, educate the profession and inform the public of the changes to be effective July 1, 2021.

[NOVEMBER 9, 2020 -- LAWPRO RENEWAL](#)

This is your deadline to file an insurance application for next year. Renewal is easy if you are making no changes and can be achieved with "one-click" in your LawPro portal under "File Online". The late filing surcharges have become significant: \$350 if you file between November 10-30 and \$600 if you file after November 30th. While you are at it, consider if you are eligible for the real estate / civil litigation exemptions.

[October 4-10 MENTAL Illness Awareness Week](#)

Mental health, addiction and wellness issues are at a crisis point for all professions and the broader communities in which we live. They cannot be ignored. The Treasurer has made this a personal priority. To better understand the scope of the problem review the thoughtful, well written Treasurer's blog at: <http://www.lawsocietygazette.ca/treasurers-blog/mental-illness-awareness-week-miaw-october-4-to-10-2020/>

[My Assist Plan](#)

Often overlooked but this program has been available to us for years. MAP is a confidential independent service designed to help us achieve health and wellness

goals. Lawyers, paralegals, law students, judges, other legal professionals and their families are covered by MAP, giving access to traditional and innovative online services.

Visit: [Member Assistance Program \(MAP\)](#)

[SECRET WEAPON](#)

The Great Library remains available even though its doors are closed to provide legal research by its librarians. You can email, chat or call Monday to Friday, from 9 to 5. The librarians are a great resource who can provide document delivery and digital copies from print texts and online databases.

[ACCESS TO JUSTICE WEEK --October 26, 2020](#)

This year's program "will focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on legal professionals and justice sector's response, public legal education, mental health, as well as Indigenous, language and human rights". You can view the A2J Week 2020 schedule at <https://lso.ca/theactiongroup/access-to-justice-week/schedule>

[ACCESS CONVOCATION](#)

Convocation sessions are once again available for public viewing via live webcast. This is important to ensure transparency in Law Society governance and decision making. On the morning of Convocation, a link to the live webcast is to be posted on the [Convocation page](#) of the Law Society website. Following meetings, a transcript and video file are to be posted as soon as possible. Login to see what your Benchers are doing to you.

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Larry Banack
Banack Resolutions, Inc.
Bay Adelaide Centre
333 Bay Street, Suite 900
Toronto, ON M5H 2T4
email: larry@banackresolutions.com
Phone: (416) 477-6880