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**Law Society of Alberta**

[www.lawsocietyalberta.com](http://www.lawsocietyalberta.com)

## **News Release**

### **SURVEY SHOWS WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION IS STILL AN ISSUE IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION**

(CALGARY, February 19, 2004) - Although workplace discrimination against women lawyers in Alberta has declined over the past 10 years, work still needs to be done with respect to discrimination in the profession on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation and disability, concluded a 2003 survey on equity and diversity in the legal profession, released today by the Law Society of Alberta.

“The Law Society of Alberta is concerned about the inequities in the legal workforce and, in order to see exactly what we are dealing with, we commissioned a survey to find out what the realities are,” said Larry Anderson, QC, president of the Law Society of Alberta. “We were pleased to see that things have improved somewhat but we also found some unpleasant results. There is a great deal of work to do to improve the working environment for certain groups of lawyers.”

The 2003 Equity and Diversity survey was designed to explore the extent of discrimination in the profession, including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age and sexual orientation. The survey demonstrated that progress had been made since a similar survey was conducted in 1991. The joint committee commissioned the study as part of its ongoing initiatives to address discrimination and bias in the legal profession.

Among active survey respondents, 39 per cent of women lawyers, 41 per cent of lawyers of colour, 28 per cent of lawyers with a non-Christian religious affiliation, 40 per cent of lawyers with a disability, and 40 per cent of gay, lesbian and bisexual lawyers reported that they had experienced discrimination firsthand while seeking employment or during the course of employment in the past five years.

“Meaningful change can only happen with the courage to ask the difficult questions and deal with the answers,” said Anderson. “The legal profession now needs to rise to the challenge of accepting that there is still discrimination in the workplace, and take greater steps to address it. Discrimination in any form is not acceptable.”

The survey, funded by the Alberta Law Foundation, was administered by the Joint Committee on Equality, Equity and Diversity, which includes the Canadian Bar Association – Alberta Branch, the Law Society of Alberta and the faculties of law at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. The survey was completed by a team of consultants - Merrill Cooper, Joan Brockman and Irene Hoffart.

The Law Society of Alberta has directed the Equality, Equity and Diversity committee to continue its work and to develop an action plan to address the survey results.

The entire report and highlights can be found at [www.lawsocietyalberta.com](http://www.lawsocietyalberta.com).

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