

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 6, 2017**

**The Advocates' Society urges stronger protection for families in response to review of family legal services in Ontario**

Toronto, ON – Today, Bradley Berg, President, and Martha McCarthy, Past President of The Advocates' Society, released the following statement:

We have received and reviewed the Family Legal Services Review released today.

Today, weaknesses in our system of family law mean that too many Ontario families and children face significant barriers to obtaining the support they need and the justice they deserve.

However, as lawyers dedicated to defending and protecting parents, spouses and children, we are deeply concerned by a number of the recommendations in this report. In particular, a move towards depriving families of important safeguards, like the protection afforded by qualified family lawyers providing oversight of life-changing legal decisions such as the custody of a child, is alarming.

We recognize the family justice system is not sustainable in its current form. It is severely underfunded, it lacks sufficient judicial resources, and it is cumbersome and complex for families to access and navigate. That is why we have consistently advocated for meaningful reform through a Unified Family Court, which would streamline and enhance access to justice for Ontario families.

Unlike the comprehensive reform for which we have advocated, these recommendations do not promise a sustainable model for access to real justice for Ontario families.

Paralegals, articling students, summer students and law clerks, working under the supervision of a lawyer, play a significant role in the practice of family law. They should continue to do so. Eliminating oversight by qualified family lawyers is not the answer. It will disproportionately harm the vulnerable families and children who need these protections most.

We once again urge the Attorney General for Ontario and Canada's Minister of Justice to offer Canadian families meaningful family justice reform through the expansion of the Unified Family Court. This will bring the change needed to give parents, families and children the justice they deserve.

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About The Advocates Society: The Advocates' Society is a professional association for trial lawyers with over 5,500 members across Canada who practice in various specialties, including family law.