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**COVID-19 Accelerates Overwhelming Need to Establish
National Network of Legal Clinics to Support Arts Sector**

***Newly Released Research Shows Canadian Artists Face Urgent Legal Needs
Due to Increasing Financial Hardship, Copyright Complexity, and Pandemic Challenges***

Vancouver, BC – The National Network of Legal Clinics for the Arts, a group comprised of members of existing Canadian pro-bono legal clinics, announces the release of a pressing report housing significant new research on the multitude of legal challenges facing individuals working in the Canadian arts sector - accelerated to critical levels due to the devastating impact of COVID-19. Entitled ***Now More Than Ever: Towards a National Network of Legal Clinics for the Arts***, the report highlights gaps in legal needs, legal literacy and education, and protections that are taking dramatic tolls on a sector whose earnings were already near poverty levels prior to the pandemic.

“The legal needs sought by artists and arts organizations are incredibly specialized,” says Martha Rans, Legal Director of Artists’ Legal Outreach (ALO) in Vancouver - one of three clinics currently a part of the emerging national network. “Most artists have difficulty navigating complex contracts and copyright issues - they find their work taken without permission and often don’t know where to turn. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, we have heard from a number of artists left out in the cold when a gallery is closed without notice, agreements cancelled without compensation, and commercial tenancies in jeopardy (including the closure of artist studios with less than 30 days notice).”

Now More Than Ever was born from a national legal Needs Assessment study, which surveyed more than 1,150 Canadian artists, arts organizations, and legal experts working in the sector and included a series of focus groups. The findings show that 94% of artists feel strongly they are facing unique legal needs. The vast majority also feel strongly they lack information and training on the legal issues related to their work, and have inadequate access to legal services.

Throughout the Needs Assessment process, artists shared heartbreaking stories of legal woes exclusive to their industry, including: discovering their design was lifted and being sold on postcards; having a foreign government hold their work hostage following a residency; submitting design concepts for a position, not being hired, and yet finding their idea on store shelves three months later; coupled with many similar issues.

“You know those terrible contracts legendary stars like Springsteen signed when they were starting out? Almost every writer, musician, and artist I know signed (at least) one of those when we were starting out because we didn’t have an agent yet, certainly couldn’t afford a lawyer and were so excited to share our work with the public that we would have signed anything (and did),” explains Mark Leiren-Young, Victoria, BC-based author. “Artists Legal Outreach is a potential life-saver and career-saver. I’m thankful they were available when I needed help.”

The research data revealed several recurring themes and areas of particular need, including:

- *Copyright*, with individual artists ranking this as their most urgent concern - in particular in emerging digital spaces - and arts organizations identifying it as #2 (behind Contracts);
- *Indigenous Artists* face unique subsets of challenges, including the ubiquity of cultural appropriation;
- *Geographic limitations*, the six existing legal clinics primarily operate in urban centres, which makes their services essentially inaccessible to a significant proportion of the artistic population who would use such services.

Legal clinics have shown they can respond quickly and nimbly to the needs of the arts & culture sector in times of crisis. By unifying these efforts into a national network, artists and arts organizations will be provided meaningful access to justice from Coast to Coast to Coast.

“We had an inkling of the need for a national model based on the increasing demand for our legal clinic’s support in each respective urban centre - but this compelling new research illuminates a need that even we did not anticipate,” says Paul Sanderson, Co-Founder of Toronto’s Artists’ Legal Advice Services (ALAS). “The findings of this report clearly demonstrate the essential call for a national strategy, so that artists living across the country, in any community, can access the legal advice and information they need. As the arts sector faces down the ongoing fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, this need has become even more immediate.”

In Canada Council for the Arts’ recent *National Survey on Federal Emergency Aid Measures and the Arts Sector in Canada (May 2020)*, the upcoming financial hardship was laid bare. Of responding artists, 42% had or would be applying to the Canada Emergency Response Benefits; among responding organizations, 41% had or would be applying to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.

“In the months since Canada went into quarantine, it is artists and creatives whose contributions have helped our country stay connected, entertained, and uplifted,” adds Rans. “It is this same community who are among those suffering the most during this time, but some of this hardship can be eased and alleviated through the establishment of Canada’s first-ever national network. We remain more committed than ever to see this dream come to reality.”

In the coming months the ALO, ALAS, and the Artists’ Legal Services Ottawa (ALSO) will begin offering Art Law Talks on a regular basis from Coast to Coast to Coast.

Now More Than Ever: Towards a National Network of Legal Clinics for the Arts was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and the department of Canadian Heritage. The full report can be viewed and downloaded at: legalclinicsforarts.com.



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About The National Network of Legal Clinics for the Arts:

The National Network of Legal Clinics for the Arts is a joint endeavour of three organizations: Artists' Legal Outreach (ALO) in Vancouver, Artists' Legal Advice Services (ALAS) in Toronto and the Artists' Legal Services Ottawa (ALSO) working in collaboration with Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO).

There are presently six legal clinics providing critical capacity support to individual creators, arts organizations, their administrators, technicians and other arts professionals in every discipline including performance, literary, digital/media and visual arts. They offer an online database of resources and dozens of educational opportunities annually (e.g. workshops and conferences). They also respond to the urgent and varied legal questions as well as needs of artists by summary legal advice and referrals. Together, the clinics empower and strengthen the arts and culture sector.

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ARTISTS' LEGAL OUTREACH