



Federal justice department to cut 65 lawyers, overhaul services

Elizabeth Thompson, iPolitics, June 20, 2014

The federal justice department plans to cut 65 lawyers and 15 managers over the next three years in a bid to save \$52 million, iPolitics has learned.

The Association of Justice Counsel, the union that represents 2,700 federal justice department lawyers, fears the cuts will result in fewer lawyers doing more work.

→ “We’re hoping that it won’t result in more stress and workload in our members offices but that is something we anticipate could happen,” said AJC president Len MacKay.

“The effort is obviously for efficiency and there are some points that they are addressing that may in fact work out, but if they don’t the morale in our offices, which is already low, may get lower.”

The justice department says the changes being instituted following its Legal Services Review will rein in the growth in the department’s spending and “ensure those services are fiscally sustainable in the long term.”

“The measures in the proposals will reduce duplication of effort and increase the reuse of opinions and tools, adding consistency and quality,” said justice department spokeswoman Carole Saindon. “They will also provide for faster, more timely and effective services for litigation and advisory. Furthermore, business analytics will allow better business decisions and performance management.”

Saindon said the department plans to cut the positions through attrition between now and 2016/17.

The job cuts appear to be part of a sweeping overhaul of how the justice department handles its legal services.

According to a letter sent to justice department staff and obtained by iPolitics, the department wants to “restructure and rationalize” some areas such as aboriginal law services and work out new agreements with other government departments that use the justice department’s legal services.

Legal research services will be centralized. Virtual libraries will replace traditional ones.

The department wants to increase the use of paralegals and reduce the amount of time that lawyers have to spend on non-legal and corporate activities like paperwork.

There will also be a shift in the way the department approaches cases, the memo suggested with “more systematic use of dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms,” a move that could mean the federal government will be more eager to head off lawsuits or settle cases out of court.

→ MacKay said the news didn’t come as a complete surprise, given the government’s push to reduce costs but he had been hoping it wouldn’t mean further job cuts.

“Our initial reaction is that this is just another attack on federal lawyers, another hit that AJC members have to take. We have already lost almost 100 positions in our membership.”

MacKay said the AJC is hoping the cuts don’t lead to more outsourcing legal services to expensive private firms.

The announcement also comes in the middle of Public Service Week, when the government celebrates its employees, he noted wryly.

“It is going to greatly outweigh any free hot dog and pop we got this week from the office celebration.”

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