**Background**: In 2022, as part of LAS’ commitment to transparency, accountability, cost-effectiveness and efficiency, Legal Aid Saskatchewan carried out a Review of its private bar billing and payments polices and processes to identify opportunities for improvement.

The Review Report can be accessed here: [Private Bar Billing Modernization: Sustaining Access to Justice](https://legalaid.sk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/LAS-Private-Bar-Billing-Modernization-20220803-Final.pdf)

Implementation of the Review recommendations began in October 2022. Implementation aims to:

* Better meet the expectations and needs of the private bar
* Increase staff engagement and satisfaction
* Deliver services in a cost-effective and efficient manner
* Limit risk and ensure adequate oversight and accountability

Legal Aid Saskatchewan management, staff, and key stakeholders (in particular the private bar) are being consulted prior to implementation of the recommendations.

**Status:** The Review recommendations are focused on seven critical dimensions:

**1.0 Organization Design & People**

LAS created a Private Bar Services Department with a Director and Private Bar Clerks in 2023. The Department ensures dedicated resources that support private bar services, important for client access to legal representation and advice.

**2.0 Policies**

LAS identified gaps, as well as opportunities to review, revise and consolidate policies related to the private bar services.

* LAS drafted a Private Bar Billing and Payments Handbook. The Handbook consolidates all policies in relation to the private bar process, from appointments, service expectations, billing and tariff, through to payment on files. The Handbook will be published on LAS’s website in the Fall 2024 after being reviewed by LAS staff and management and the private bar.
* LAS drafted new policies including
* Exceptional Circumstances Payments Policies, for criminal and family law, to replace the “additional hours” policy.
* Case Management Policy for costly criminal law cases.
* LAS launched two private bar pilots, one in criminal law and the other in family law, in 2023. These pilots are focused on Exceptional Circumstances Payments and Case Management. LAS is currently evaluating the results of these pilots. A decision is pending on expansion of exceptional circumstances payments and case management to the entire private bar panel in the Fall 2024.

**3.0 Processes**

Many of LAS’s billing and payments processes remain manual. Efforts are underway to develop a technological solution to standardize and create more effective and efficient processing of billing and payments. Please see 4.0 Technology below for details.

**4.0 Technology**

In 2023, LAS posted a Request for Services (RFS) for Phase I of the Private Bar Online Portal. MNP Consulting, the successful proponent, completed the functional assessment and technology review in June 2024, and developed a business case. Phase I recommendation is the development of a new system in preference to expansion of current technology (LAIN) or maintaining the status quo. A new platform will modernize, simplify and streamline interactions between the private bar and LAS.

LAS continues to work though Government of Saskatchewan’s IT Governance structure – The Innovation Table, Information Management Advisory Council, and Information Technology Governance Committee - seeking approval and endorsement of the business case for tender. Anticipated timeline involves going to IMAC (final stage of endorsement to proceed to RFS) with the business case in November 2024.

LAS is concurrently completing a Law Foundation of Saskatchewan grant application for funding to be considered at its quarterly meeting on September 24,2024.

**5.0 Accountability**

LAS continues to clarify “who is responsible for what” with regard to private bar billing and payments. In addition to the Private Bar Services Department, other Departments at LAS play a role in private bar services, including area directors and ﬁnance. Greater clarity had led to improved services and consistency of decision-making.

**6.0 Performance Measurement, Reporting**

LAS is developing standards for service delivery, including performance measures such as “time to process private bar requests for authorizations” and “time to pay”. In June 2024, LAS consulted with the private bar on these measures. The measures are in the early stages of implementation with staff tracking the measures manually.

LAS has identified the kind of reporting that is needed for accountability and risk management. Much reporting on private bar services remains manual. LAS will build performance measures and electronic reporting into its online platform.

**7.0 Private Bar Satisfaction**

LAS surveyed the private bar in June 2024. The survey results were overall positive, with some key improvement opportunities identified. The survey results together with an improvement plan will be published in the Fall 2024. The Private Bar 2004 Satisfaction Survey Report can be accessed here.

**More Information**

For more information on the Billing and Payments Modernization Project, please see LAS‘ website: <https://legalaid.sk.ca/lawyer/private-bar-process-review/>