

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: March 21, 2025

BALANCING THE SCALES: NEW FREE ONLINE TRAINING TO HELP DELIVER BETTER ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR BLACK AND INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUALS

TORONTO – Today, on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO), in collaboration with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC), has launched new free digital educational training to equip social service workers and legal professionals with the knowledge and tools to better serve Black and Indigenous clients who are experiencing the collateral consequences of criminal justice involvement.

A new report from JHSO, "Uneven Scales: An Exploration of the Distinct Legal Experiences of Black and Indigenous People in Ontario," sheds light on the urgent need for these new resources. The report exposes the unique civil legal challenges—such as housing loss and barriers to employment—disproportionately impacting Black and Indigenous individuals due to their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. The findings come as housing instability, income insecurity and labour market volatility reach critical levels in Ontario.

Through surveys and interviews with 52 participants comprised of legal professionals, community service providers, and people with lived experience (PWLE), the report findings include:

- PWLE respondents identified a need for legal support that is accessible, culturally appropriate, and ensures they have full understanding of the processes and decisions.
- Despite the *R. v. Gladue* and *R. v. Morris* rulings requiring courts to consider Indigenous and Black identity in decisions affecting liberty, respondents highlighted a critical gap: a lack of resourcing for culturally responsive, community-based services to support individuals throughout the legal process, to achieve the intents of these court decisions.
- A continued lack of understanding in the court system regarding the purpose and application of *Gladue* and IRCA reports (Impact of Race and Culture Assessments) or EPSRs (Enhanced Pre-Sentence Reports).

"The impacts of systemic racism and intergenerational trauma are far-reaching for Black and Indigenous people, and service gaps leave many without the culturally appropriate legal and social support they need," said Christin Cullen, Chief Executive Officer at JHSO. "This research lays bare the urgent need for culturally responsive, trauma-informed approaches to address the intersecting legal needs of both Indigenous and Black populations."

Co-developed with OFIFC and BLAC, JHSO has launched new training modules for professionals working with justice-involved clients in an effort to fill

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the education gap, and which aim to:

- Provide cultural and historical context, detailing the lasting impacts of colonialism and systemic racism in the criminal justice system;
- Equip practitioners with trauma-informed strategies to better support the complex legal needs of Indigenous and Black individuals;
- Provide information on how to assist clients with Gladue and IRCA/EPSP reports, which are critical in ensuring fairer legal outcomes for Indigenous and Black individuals;
- Offer practical tips, including print resources, such as civil legal checklists, for defence lawyers and duty counsel.

"We're very proud to introduce these new training resources alongside OFFC and BLAC. By building awareness and strengthening legal advocacy, these tools will help justice sector professionals interrupt the costly cycle of collateral justice consequences and increase access to justice for Black and Indigenous individuals involved in the criminal justice system," stated Cullen.

All these free resources are accessible on the [JHS Learning Hub](#), a digital learning platform designed to support professionals serving justice-involved individuals across Ontario.

QUOTES

"We were excited to work with the John Howard Society of Ontario on this project and to bring awareness to one of the over-looked consequences of Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system. The collateral consequences of justice involvement contribute to the on-going marginalization of Indigenous communities and deepen cycles of poverty. These training modules are a meaningful step in creating culturally-responsive pathways that can help people restore a sense of control over their lives."

-- Sean Longboat, Co-Executive Director, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

"These training modules are a critical step toward dismantling the systemic barriers that Black communities face within the justice system. By providing essential cultural and historical context, along with practical, trauma-informed approaches to client support, we are progressively equipping professionals with the tools they need to foster equity and justice. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to creating a more inclusive and responsive legal system for all."

-- Demar Kemar Hewitt, Executive Director & General Counsel, Black Legal Action Centre

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The [John Howard Society of Ontario](#) works to keep the humanity in justice. Through 19 local offices across Ontario, the JHSO delivers more than 80 evidence-based programs and services in support of those affected by the criminal justice system. In doing so, we help build safer, more resilient communities.

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