

MEDIA RELEASE



Sunday 22 November 2020

Legal profession welcomes return to office to support justice system

Limited return to office will allow lawyers to more effectively support clients and the justice system, according to the Law Institute of Victoria.

LIV President Sam Pandya today welcomed the staged return to office announced by Premier Dan Andrews.

From November 30, office-based workplaces can return to up to 25 per cent on any one day. And to enable small firms to return to the office, businesses with less than 40 employees can have up to 10 staff on site, subject to the density quotient of 1 person per 4m².

Mr Pandya said the legal profession had long advocated for staged return to offices to allow lawyers to support their clients in the wider community.

“The fact is that not everything can be done effectively from home. Some of the issues dealt with by lawyers are extremely confidential and sensitive it is not always practical to give clients legal advice and support over zoom,” he said.

“Many legal practitioners for the good of the community have had to take their work home which in some cases involves graphic, traumatic and disturbing material,” he said.

The LIV has been in regular communication with Department of Justice and Community Safety to have to restrictions eased, including writing several submissions, including to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy.

The LIV pushed for both a modest return to the workforce for larger CBD based firms, as well as safe return to offices to enable suburban and regional firms to reopen to clients.

“Many of our lawyers have reported that their clients are often elderly or not as tech savvy as corporate clients with many files and associated documents, such as wills, only in paper form,”

Mr Pandya said COVID-19 has caused large delays in access to justice, but the profession has worked collaboratively with the Courts and government to ensure the wheels of justice continued to turn.

He said the legal profession welcomed the opportunity to return to the office which has benefits including ensuring staff with mental health or well being concerns related to working from home can return to the office; allowing staff to engage with colleagues in a safe controlled environment; ensuring staff has access to an appropriate working environment and allowing practices to manage the return to office in a safe and controlled manner.

“This is a sensible step in the move towards COVID-normal and we thank the government for its consultation with our profession and listening to our advice and concerns,” he said.

Contact: Kerry O’Shea, Public Affairs Manager **M:** 0408 727 279 or Amanda Rajendra, Media & Communications Officer **T:** 03 9607 9597 **E:** media@liv.asn.au