

Modernization of Alberta Registry Agents (2020)

Issue

The Government of Alberta regulates the Alberta Registry Agents' (ARAs) Regulation by capping the fee amounts for most of the services they provide. In addition, Registry Agents are eager to develop a modernization plan to enhance services, including online registry services to Albertans in conjunction with Service Alberta and other stakeholders. The Government of Alberta should support these modernization efforts and review regulations to ensure Alberta Registry Agents can continue their vital work effectively.

Background

Virtually every municipality in Alberta has an Authorized Registry Agent, forming a network that collectively employs over 1500 Albertans. There are 206 Agents located in 150 Alberta Communities (32 or 21% are in large urban centers and 118 or 79% are in rural and small urban jurisdictions). Registries have become a vital part of Albertan communities in providing stable jobs, an important community link, and fundamental services.

In addition, Albertans value registry services and continue to take advantage of the ease of access offered by local registry agents. In survey findings, 74% of respondents have visited a registry agent in the last year. Furthermore, over 90% of respondents expressed the importance of having access to government services located in their communities and felt that it would have a negative impact on their communities if their local Registry Agent were to close.¹

However, because of modern work and family schedules, Albertans also expect registry services to also be made available to them online. Although some registry services are already offered online, the ability to expand these services to reflect new technological requirements and a growing population has been severely restricted. Registry agents are aware of the need to modernize their industry to keep pace with the needs of their clients and are seeking support from the Government of Alberta to expand their level of service to reflect a modern, connected, and responsive industry.

In order for the registry agent network to position itself to serve the diverse needs of all Albertans, a model that offers financial stability with long-term assurance of sustainability is essential. No service charge model is in place for the registries similar to other regulated industries such as the bottle recycling industry. A static capped fee restricts registry agents from keeping pace with natural operational increases and limits the amount of capital that can be reinvested into businesses in order to expand and modernize their delivery models in a variety of settings.

A combination of rural, urban, online, and in-person delivery models offered by Registry Agents are needed to provide Albertans services for over 200 products on behalf of five government departments. In order to ensure that registry agents are equipped and can work effectively and efficiently, support of the government is crucial. A viable business model needs to be developed to guarantee the levels of service and access is not only maintained but also expanded to reflect the dynamic nature of the industry. Additionally, the Government of Alberta is still in direct competition with Registry Agents for some online services, like traffic fines

¹ A Public Opinion poll conducted on August 30, 2019.

Other organizations also see the value in a new fee model and the modernization of the industry to ensure the continuance of the high level of service which Albertans have come to expect from their Registry Agents. In 2016, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) passed a resolution recognizing the “vital role and positive impact that ARAs have in Alberta communities” and recommended the Government of Alberta negotiate a new fee structure and protect ARAs revenue streams.²

The Government of Alberta has responded on January 1, 2020³ by increasing capped fees on certain services for the first time in 14 years. However, these changes alone do not ensure both a sustainable business model and expansion of services for Registry agents, nor do they provide the support necessary to aid in the modernization of the Registry Agent Industry.

The Government of Alberta should recognize the vital role of Registry Agents in the delivery of essential government services to all Albertans, particularly their positive impact in rural Alberta communities, and work to strengthen their partnership with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents and local municipalities.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta:

1. Support the modernization of the Registry Agent Industry;
2. Expand existing online services available to Albertans through Registry Agents; and
3. Ensure the long-term sustainability of rural Registry Agents, including a fair and equitable service charge model.

² <https://auma.ca/advocacy-services/resolutions/resolutions-index/sustainable-support-local-registry-agents>

³ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/4883fcbd-8a22-400f-80d0-89f590100a9b/resource/eb03b44e-3666-4ff6-a532-bc74c59dca54/download/sa-registry-agent-product-catalogue-2020-01.pdf>