



Promoting clinical legal education in Canadian law schools

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Promouvoir l'enseignement clinique du droit dans les facultés de droit canadiennes

Hon. Caroline Mulroney  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
11th Floor, 720 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Sent by email to [caroline.mulroney@pc.ola.org](mailto:caroline.mulroney@pc.ola.org)

May 23, 2019

Dear Attorney General Mulroney,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Association for Canadian Clinical Legal Education (ACCLE) to urge you to reverse the cuts to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). These cuts will result in an access to justice crisis. They will not result in the cost savings or the promotion of long-term sustainability that the government is promising. These cuts will also reduce law students' ability to provide services and weaken experiential and work-based learning in Ontario law schools.

The cuts have been rationalized as providing cost savings but will in fact have the opposite effect. While the extraordinary cuts to LAO will result in short-term savings, they will create long-term increased costs. In 2002, the budget of British Columbia's Legal Services Society was similarly cut by almost 40%. Since that time, British Columbia has seen an increase in unrepresented litigants and has also witnessed further strains resulting from unresolved legal issues, particularly family law matters, shown to result in expensive social problems such as poor health, increased reliance on social assistance, unemployment, domestic violence and relationship breakdown. As well, the decrease in funding to essential legal services will result in increased demand on other provincially funded services including health care and increased reliance on social services.

The provincial government claims that "[t]here is more money being spent on less cases [at LAO]" and that if LAO as an organization reforms, it can help more people with less funding. We respectfully submit that these two claims are incorrect. The 2018 Auditor General's report, as well as LAO's quarterly reports, indicate a 23% increase in the number of legal aid certificates issued between 2013 and 2018. As well, LAO provided services and representation to 13,000 more people in 2017-2018 than in 2013-2014. Additionally, 95% of LAO's budget directly compensates those providing legal services. The drastic cuts to funding will necessarily result in less clients being served.

Legal Aid Ontario serves the most vulnerable people living on low-income in Ontario; refugees fleeing violence and persecution, women facing domestic violence, Indigenous people, racialized people, and people living with mental health issues. The proposed cuts will directly impact service provision including services provided by legal clinics throughout the province. Decreased funding for LAO will result in increased marginalization of already vulnerable people as well as increased cost to the province.

The extraordinary cuts to LAO will have devastating impacts on the provision of essential legal services in Ontario. They will also reduce clinics' ability to provide quality work-based and experiential education to law students. We urge you to do the right thing; reconsider the cuts and reverse them.

We are pleased to speak with you further about these cuts at your convenience.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gemma Smyth', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gemma Smyth  
President  
Association for Canadian Clinical Legal Education