



RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Room 281
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

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

Wednesday, June 5, 2019

Re: Reverse cuts to Legal Aid Ontario to safeguard health

Dear Premier Ford and Attorney General Mulroney,

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) urges you to reverse the cuts to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) announced in the 2019 Ontario Budget. The 36 per cent reduction in provincial funding this year (\$133 million) will deepen to a 44 per cent reduction (\$164 million) by 2021-2022.¹ In addition, the provincial government has instructed them to use only federal funding for refugee and immigration services.² This has caused refugee law offices to "have limited capacity and as a result, not all clients will be able to receive assistance."^{3 4}

Ontarians who are using LAO legal services are living with low income and are among the most vulnerable people in our society. Community legal clinic clients are disproportionately people living with physical and mental disabilities, single mothers, newcomers, racialized people, seniors, survivors of abuse and torture, and other historically disadvantaged groups.⁵ They depend on these critical services for help accessing the necessities of life such as income support, housing, and safety when escaping dangerous situations as victims of domestic violence or as refugees. The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers and the Ontario Refugee Lawyers Association have jointly stated that these cuts have "life-threatening consequences, including detention, torture and possibly even death after deportation to the places from which they fled."⁶

Community legal clinics are particularly skilled and experienced in working with people trying to survive on low income and facing complex challenges that are often interrelated. Bureaucracies, complex laws, and cascading consequences (such as a family facing eviction when an employer does not pay wages or the social assistance payment does not arrive) are inherent characteristics of poverty law.^{7 8} Whether helping individuals and families on a case-by-case basis or addressing systemic issues through test cases and policy analysis, the work of this agency is invaluable to the health and safety of people and of our communities.

Cutting funding to critical legal services for people already struggling threatens lives, erodes health, and affects human dignity. A government concerned about prudent spending should consider that for every \$1 spent on legal aid, about \$6 of public funds are saved elsewhere.⁹

Premier Ford and AG Mulroney, RNAO and our over 42,000 members call on you to reverse proposed cuts to LAO.

With warmest regards and respect,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), Dr(hc), FAAN, O.ONT
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

CC: Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Andrea Horwath, Leader, Official Opposition
John Fraser, Interim Leader, Ontario Liberal Party
Mike Schreiner, Leader, Green Party of Ontario
Sara Singh, NDP Critic, Attorney General
France G linas, NDP Critic, Health Care

¹ Stop Legal Aid Cuts website (2019). <https://stoplegalaidscuts.nationbuilder.com/>

² Legal Aid Ontario (2019, April 15). Interim changes to LAO refugee and immigration services. Toronto: Author. https://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/2019-04-15_refugee-services-clients.asp

³ Legal Aid Ontario. Interim refugee law services. <https://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/refugee-interim-services.asp>

⁴ Legal Aid Ontario (2019, May 15). In brief: LAO providing limited refugee law services through staff offices.

Toronto: Author. https://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/2019-05-21_interim-refugee-services-lawyer.asp

⁵ Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (2019). Clinic Work. Toronto: Author. <https://aclco.org/legal-clinics/clinic-work/>

⁶ Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers and Refugee Lawyers Association of Ontario (2019, April 12). Media release: Refugee lawyers join legal advocates across the province to condemn cuts to Legal Aid Ontario. Toronto: Author. <http://laontario.ca/index.php/2019/04/12/media-release-refugee-lawyers-join-legal-advocates-across-the-province-to-condemn-cuts-to-legal-aid-ontario/>

⁷ Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (2019). Clinic Work. Toronto: Author. <https://aclco.org/legal-clinics/clinic-work/>

⁸ Abramowicz, L. (2004). The critical characteristics of community legal aid clinics in Ontario. *Journal of Law and Social Policy*. Volume 19. 70-81. <https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=jlsp>

⁹ Canadian Bar Association (2013, November). *Reaching equal justice: An invitation to envision and act*. Ottawa: Author, 56. http://www.cba.org/CBA/MediaLibrary/cba_na/images/Equal%20Justice%20-%20Microsite/PDFs/EqualJusticeFinalReport-eng.pdf#p55