

Who Qualifies for Certificate Services?

Legal Aid Ontario makes sure clients only get assistance when it is appropriate to their circumstances.

This includes services, such as LAO's certificate program.

Determining if a client is a candidate for a certificate

To establish if their circumstances warrant a legal aid certificate, clients undergo a thorough interview with an LAO assessment officer to determine if they meet both LAO's legal and financial requirements.

The review includes Assets, Income, Debt/Expenses, marital status, dependents, type of accommodation and family size.

Clients must also provide proof of their finances to support their application to the certificate program. This proof includes:

- pay stubs
- social assistance
- pension income
- Employment Insurance (EI) or Work and Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) statements, and/or
- financial statements (if self-employed)
- rent receipts
- utility bills
- debt payments
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All clients applying for legal assistance must sign a declaration affirming the accuracy of all details provided. Providing false information may mean:

- cancellation of the client's certificate,
- action taken to recover money paid and/or
- prosecution.
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While some discretion is used within the frameworks of LAO policy, decisions may vary depending on the client's specific circumstances.

About eighty percent of legal aid applications are processed the same day, but it may take longer if more information is required.

Domestic violence candidates

Legal Aid Ontario puts a high priority on helping victims of domestic violence. For people who are experiencing violence or the effects of violence, crisis and abuse, financial assessment is flexible, and if necessary, may be waived to expedite the application process.

Financial Reassessment

Active client accounts are reviewed annually to confirm their certificate status and, when applicable, may be reassessed. No re-evaluation is necessary in situations where

- the case is nearly finished, or an amendment of the certificate cannot be done before the end of a case
- the client has been charged under the Young Offenders Act, or
- the client is on disability (ODSP)
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Clients and lawyers are required to contact LAO for reassessment if there is a change in the client's financial situation. Failure to submit documentation for re-evaluation means the certificate will be cancelled and the client made responsible for all legal fees.

Should there be any discrepancies in the client's information, LAO may:

1. send a reassessment notice and ask the client to go to their regional area office
2. review the documents to see if there has been a change in their financial circumstances
- 3.

If LAO is satisfied with the information supplied, the client's status will remain the same. If not, an area director or administrator will review the information and, if necessary, send it to LAO Investigations.

Legal Aid Ontario is governed by the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Legal Aid Services Act. Consequently, we are prohibited from confirming or denying any client or case.

LAO is accountable to the provincial government and to the public for the use of public funds. LAO takes this responsibility seriously. Although we cannot confirm whether or not an individual is legally aided, we investigate every complaint.

Our complaints policy is on our website for anyone to access:

www.legalaid.on.ca/en/getting/complaints.asp