



# What is Legal Aid Ontario's certificate program?

Legal Aid Ontario's certificate program allows eligible, low-income Ontarians to have full representation by their own lawyer. A certificate is a voucher guaranteeing that the lawyer will get paid for representing the legal aid client for a certain number of hours. Certificates are only for the most serious legal matters.

In some cases, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) will pay for all necessary legal expenses. In other cases, a contribution or payment agreement is required with the certificate. By signing this agreement, clients acknowledge that they will repay some or all of their legal fees. More information about contribution agreements is available at [www.legalaid.on.ca](http://www.legalaid.on.ca).

Once clients receive a certificate from Legal Aid Ontario, they can take it to one of the nearly 4,500 lawyers in Ontario who accept legal aid certificates. Clients can choose a private practice lawyer, which means he or she is not an employee of LAO, or in some areas, clients can take their certificates to a Legal Aid Ontario staff lawyer.

## Who qualifies for a certificate?

Low-income Ontarians can get a certificate if:

- their legal problem is one that Legal Aid Ontario covers
- they meet the [financial eligibility guidelines](#)
- they have no other way of getting legal help.

Legal problems that may be covered include:

- [criminal charges](#), where a jail sentence is likely
- [serious family problems](#), such as child protection issues
- [immigration and refugee matters](#).

## Domestic violence candidates

Legal Aid Ontario puts a high priority on helping people experiencing domestic violence and abuse. In these cases, financial assessment is flexible, and if necessary, may be waived to expedite the application process.

## How do I apply for a legal aid certificate?

Low-income Ontarians can apply for a legal aid certificate through Legal Aid Ontario's toll-free number (1-800-668-8258), in-person at one of our local courthouse-based offices, or in some cases, at a [district office](#). It's best to call the toll-free number for more information, before visiting an office in-person.

To receive a legal aid certificate, applicants will be interviewed by a legal aid staff person to determine if they are eligible for the certificate program. The interview will determine whether the applicant's legal issue is one that Legal Aid Ontario covers, and if they qualify financially for legal aid services.

### ***Financial eligibility***

Financial eligibility is determined by a simple test that looks at annual income and family size. Generally, this means that the applicant has little or no money left after paying for basic things like housing and food. For a single person to qualify for a legal aid certificate, the maximum amount of annual income is \$12,863.

### ***Proof of finances***

Applicants must provide proof of their finances to complete the application process. All applicants are also required to sign a declaration affirming that the information they have provided is true.

Providing false information may mean:

- cancellation of the certificate,
- actions taken to recover money paid, including prosecution.

### ***Application processing***

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

## Financial reassessment

Active client accounts are reviewed annually to confirm their certificate status. At this time, the account may be reassessed.

Clients and lawyers are required to contact LAO for reassessment if there is a change in the client's financial situation.

## Number of certificates issued 2009 to 2014, by area of law

Area of law	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Criminal	63,501	58,670	65,633	58,685	54,949
Family	27,488	24,614	21,406	18,923	19,027
Immigration and refugee	12,904	12,453	13,637	8,430	5,308
Other civil	5,417	4,650	4,871	4,331	4,374
Total certificates issued	109,310	100,387	105,547	90,369	83,658

## For more information

For more information on this topic contact [media@lao.on.ca](mailto:media@lao.on.ca)