



LEGAL AID ONTARIO  
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Fact Sheet

# Complaints

Any person can make a complaint, including current and former clients, lawyers, someone who has been refused a service or any other person who may be affected by the services Legal Aid Ontario provides, including services from a community legal clinic or a Student Legal Aid Services Society.

## **The complaint process**

The complaint process at Legal Aid Ontario has three stages. More information on the complaint process as well as a complaint form can be found on the Legal Aid website: [www.legalaid.on.ca/en/getting/complaints.asp](http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/getting/complaints.asp) or you can contact the Complaints Department directly at:

### **Complaints Department**

Legal Aid Ontario  
40 Dundas St. West - Suite 200  
Toronto, Ontario, M5G 2H1  
Phone: (416) 204-7104  
Toll Free: 1-866-874-9786  
Fax: (416) 204-4718  
E-mail: [complaints@lao.on.ca](mailto:complaints@lao.on.ca)

At all stages of the process, the complainant will receive an acknowledgement letter no more than five days after Legal Aid Ontario receives the complaint. If the matter has not been resolved within thirty days, the complainant will receive a letter with an update.

## **Stage I**

### **Resolution process for complaints about District Offices and Provincial Office departments**

Legal Aid Ontario will first try to resolve the complaint at the local level. This means that district offices and provincial departments are responsible for trying to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be sent an acknowledgement letter no more than five days after Legal Aid Ontario receives the complaint.

### **Resolution process for community legal clinics and Student Legal Aid Services Societies**

All clinics and SLASS must have a Stage I Complaints Policy, which means they must try to resolve complaints from clients and the public.

Clinic complainants must first file their complaints with the clinic and follow that clinic's complaint policy before starting LAO's complaint process.

Once the complaint has been investigated, the clinic board will send the complainant a letter with the outcome of the investigation and any resolution. This letter should also advise the complainant of the right to request a review of the decision by the Complaints Department.

## **Stage II**

A complainant has the right to contact the Complaints Department in Legal Aid Ontario's provincial office for a review of the resolution when:

- the complainant is unhappy with the resolution the district office or provincial department has provided
- the complainant is unhappy with the clinic board's or SLASS dean's final decision.

The Complaints Department reviews how the district area director, provincial office manager, clinic or SLASS handled the complaint, and collects additional information from the complainant and the local office, if necessary. Once the review by the Complaints Department is completed, Legal Aid Ontario will provide the complainant with a written decision.

## **Stage III**

If the complainant is unhappy with the resolution of the Complaints Department, General Counsel can review the complaint. General Counsel reviews the first and second stage resolutions and collects additional information, if necessary. A written resolution is provided to the complainant when General Counsel completes the review. The decision of General Counsel is final. There is no appeal or further review.

## **2010-11 Complaints Department annual report highlights:**

- In 2010-11, a total of 310 Stage I complaints were received.
  - The majority of these complaints pertain to services provided by lawyers acting on legal aid certificates (148 complaints in 2010-11).
- At the Stage II level, 13 formal complaints were received
- At the Stage III level, three complaints were received

## **Ombudsman Ontario**

The Ontario Ombudsman received complaints about Legal Aid Ontario regarding certificate refusals, appeals, liens, refunds, the status of matters and general information. In 2010-2011, 48.6% of complaints were resolved within one week, and 78.8% were resolved within a month.

## **Abuse of the legal aid system**

Complaints about clients abusing the legal aid system account for less than one per cent of certificates issued by LAO. Legal Aid Ontario records and investigates all of these complaints, which usually allege that the applicant does not financially qualify for legal aid assistance. In 2010-11, LAO received 230 complaints about people abusing the system. Twenty-five per cent of these complaints resulted in the cancellation of a certificate.

In order to assist the public in reporting suspected fraud or wrong-doing, Legal Aid Ontario recently introduced a confidential Ethics Hotline which can be reached at 1-877-312-7753.

## **Questions?**

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