

# HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT



## Unhappy with our services? Talk to us

Anyone who is unhappy with a service received from Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), a community legal clinic or a legal aid lawyer has the right to file a formal complaint.

LAO will consider your complaint, even if you do not want to tell us your name. You can be:

- a current or former Legal Aid Ontario client
- a lawyer
- a person who has been affected by services from a community legal clinic, a student legal aid services society or any other Legal Aid Ontario service provider
- the Ontario Office of the Ombudsman (the LAO's Complaints Department liaises with this office).

### However:

- any individual who has been refused a service or has an issue with a contribution agreement must first comply with the *Legal Aid Services Act*, which says they must first complete the appeals process.
- Legal Aid Ontario is not authorized to handle certain complaints, such as human rights issues and some employment concerns.

## The complaints process

Please start by contacting LAO's Complaints Department. We will record your complaint and send you an acknowledgement letter within five days of receiving your call or letter. Should your complaint be resolved within that time, this acknowledgement letter will say so. The Complaints Department will also send you a status letter within 30 days if your issue has not yet been resolved by then.

### Stage 1: Attempt to resolve your complaint in your area of the province

The Complaints Department will refer you to the LAO organization in your area responsible for your issue. This could be your community legal clinic, your student legal aid society, your local district office or the LAO provincial department. **You will need to fill in and send this organization a complaint form.**

[Download the complaint form \(PDF\)](#)

You can ask the Complaints Department to tell you how to access and fill in this form.

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### Fast facts

While complaints about clients abusing the legal aid system account for less than one per cent of certificates issued, LAO records and investigates them all.

These complaints usually allege that the applicant does not financially qualify for legal aid assistance.

In 2014/15, LAO received 411 such complaints, 20 per cent of which resulted in the cancellation of a certificate.

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## Stage 2: Ask Legal Aid Ontario's Complaints Department to help you resolve the complaint

If you are unhappy with the result of your complaint to the clinic board, SLASS, district office or provincial department, you can ask the Complaints Department to review it.

The Complaints Department will gather all the information you provided during stage 1, determine what decisions have been made so far and why, contact you for more information if necessary, and come to one of three decisions:

- Your complaint has been properly addressed and nothing more needs to be done
- Another organization may be able to resolve your complaint
- The office you were complaining about did not properly address the issue and needs to take certain actions to resolve the situation.

## Stage 3: Contact the General Counsel's Office

If you are still not happy, you can ask the General Counsel's Office to review your complaint.

The general counsel is the most senior lawyer at Legal Aid Ontario. He or she will review every resolution that has been attempted in your case so far. If required, he or she will collect additional information.

The general counsel will then provide you with a written decision. This decision is final. You cannot appeal it or ask for a further review.

## For more information

Mail: Complaints department  
Legal Aid Ontario  
40 Dundas St. West, Suite 200  
Toronto, ON M5G 2H1

Phone: 416 204-7104  
1 866 874-9786

Fax: 416 204-4718

Email: [complaints@lao.on.ca](mailto:complaints@lao.on.ca)

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### Fast facts

LAO's Complaints Department received 14 formal complaints (13 relating to legal aid and one relating to a legal clinic) at the stage 2 level in 2014/15.

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### Fast facts

LAO's Complaints Department received five formal complaints at the stage 3 level in 2014/15.

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### QUESTIONS

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

### APPLYING FOR LEGAL AID

People who want to apply for legal aid can call LAO toll-free at 1-800-668-8258, Mon. to Fri. 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.