

The Next Steps in the Transformation of Legal Aid Ontario

(This message was sent out by Legal Aid Ontario President and CEO Bob Ward to all employees on Thursday, November 5th, 2009)

The purpose of this message is to advise you that we will be accelerating and broadening the significant transformation of Legal Aid Ontario that began two and a half years ago under the Quantum process. The changes will be occurring over the next several months and coming year.

Since the beginning of LAO, as an organization, we have done much to advance access to justice in Ontario. Yet, as we all know, more always needs to be done to serve our clients in the most effective and efficient ways possible. Also, as many of you are aware, revenues to LAO from the Law Foundation have dropped significantly resulting in a large deficit that must be addressed at the same time as demand for our services remains high as a result of a slowdown in the economy. The terms of the provincial government's recently-announced, multi-year \$150 million investment in the legal aid system require that it be earmarked for enhancements to client services and not be applied to LAO's revenue shortfall.

We must face these challenges with determination and a commitment to sustained innovation in the nature and scope of all parts of our work.

It is certain that in the future in many parts of our overall structure, our staff requirements will be less than they are now and that in others, there will a need for some staff increases to improve client service. In this process, however, difficult but necessary decisions will have to be made about our current organizational structure and the size of our staff complement.

As we move through this transformation process, I want to assure you that all changes affecting staff will be managed with fairness and compassion. Personnel affected by changes will be notified in the coming months and a range of possible options will be identified involving retraining, job transfers and voluntary exit packages where appropriate. I regret to advise, however, that in view of the financial situation facing LAO at this time, the "no lay-off" policy that has been in place for the last two years cannot continue and that involuntary layoffs will occur.

The coming changes will be built on the solid foundation that has been put in place since LAO was established. In particular, the changes will advance the developments that have been successfully implemented more recently to give an even greater client-focus to our work. For example:



- The regionalization of our operations has improved coordination and accountability of LAO services;
- The new Simplified On-line Application Process is making it much easier and quicker for clients to get answers about their eligibility;
- The push to have LAO more accessible in courthouses has made it easier for clients to access our help and has been more effective in helping the justice system to process cases;
- The new client service centre is making access to legal aid information and advice just a telephone call away;
- The revised LAO web site makes legal aid information much more accessible to many more Ontarians;
- We have initiated a lawyer workforce strategy to ensure that our legal staff develop experience in all areas in which our services are available; and
- About a year ago, we were able to make some long overdue, but still only modest improvements to duty counsel salaries.
- In addition, we have taken a more comprehensive approach to safeguarding the taxpayer's interests through initiatives in a number of key areas:
 - We have significantly expanded our oversight and management capacity of more complex criminal cases;
 - We have begun a complex process of determining proper measurements of program effectiveness;
 - We have established a new internal audit and evaluation capacity to give us better insights into protecting the taxpayers investment in our program;
 - There is a greater emphasis on improved strategic planning at the corporate level and greater attention to determining and meeting specific objectives by senior management; and
 - Expenses of senior management have been transparent to the public via our web site for the last 18 months.

The future of Legal Aid Ontario will expand on these initiatives considerably and help ensure that we are giving full expression of our mandate under our legislation. The transformation process will be based the following principles:

More tailored client services.

Without reducing the current spectrum of the services we now offer, we will, nevertheless, endeavour to more creatively match what the client needs to new and existing services. Clients will be able to obtain the right service at the right time. This will mean greater emphasis on the provision of legal information, further significant



emphasis on the presence of LAO in courthouses and enhanced duty counsel service where it better suits the client's interest.

Less costly infrastructure.

Initiatives aimed at increasing access to client services such as effective referrals, legal support and significantly streamlining the certificate application process, will in turn reduce the need for certain administrative and overhead costs at the Area and Provincial Office levels. Over time, the role of the new District Office structure will become a key hub of LAO activities supporting our work with service providers and networks with our justice system partners in the field.

Much greater oversight of and support for service providers.

This will be a key new role of regional vice-presidents and their District Offices. It will mean that LAO will be much more focussed on working with service providers to enhance their effectiveness, efficiency and quality as required under our legislation. The role of Area Committees will also evolve to ensure faster and even more effective service to clients who need to know the status of their appeals as soon as possible. There will be further structural and program changes at provincial office to enhance LAO's role to ensure compliance with corporate policies and procedures relative to payments to service providers.

While the next phase at LAO will indeed be challenging, it will help ensure that LAO will be well-positioned to meet client needs well into the future. I would like to thank all of you for your continued dedication to LAO's mandate and for your very hard work in support of Ontario's most vulnerable individuals.

Sincerely,

Bob Ward

President and CEO

November 5, 2009

