

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR LAWYER

YOUR LAWYER SHOULD:

- ✓ thoroughly review your specific issue or case and explain your options
- ✓ speak for you and help you get what you are entitled to, based on the law
- ✓ keep in contact with you on the progress of your case
- ✓ tell you in advance when you have to come back to court and why
- ✓ prepare you for every hearing or court appearance
- ✓ advise you when someone else is coming to court in his or her place, and make sure that person is qualified and prepared
- ✓ give you contact information for him/her or someone else to call if you can't reach him/her
- ✓ treat you with dignity and respect
- ✓ if you are a person with a disability, accommodate your needs
- ✓ behave professionally.

CALL OUR COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

Most lawyers provide professional, quality service. If, however, you experience any of the issues below, please contact our Complaints Department, by phone at **416-204-7104** or **1-866-874-9786**, or by e-mail at complaints@lao.on.ca:

- ✗ ask you for any money; your certificate entitles your lawyer to get paid by Legal Aid Ontario
- ✗ behave, through inappropriate words or actions, in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable
- ✗ unnecessarily rush you into making a decision
- ✗ guarantee success (no lawyer can do that).

CONTACT US

TELEPHONE IN TORONTO **416-979-1446**
TOLL FREE **1-800-668-8258**

www.legalaid.on.ca



FINDING THE RIGHT LEGAL AID LAWYER

Learn how to find this important professional, what he or she can do for your case, and how to make the most of your relationship.



WHAT'S A LEGAL AID CERTIFICATE?

If you are a low-income Ontarian, you may be eligible for a Legal Aid Ontario certificate. You can take or send your LAO-issued certificate to a private practice lawyer who accepts legal aid cases. If the lawyer acknowledges the certificate, he or she agrees to represent you for a specified number of hours, in a legal proceeding, up to and including a trial.

FINDING A LEGAL AID LAWYER

There are a number of ways to find a lawyer. You could, for instance:

- go to our finding a lawyer tool (legalaid.on.ca/find), and type in your location and the area of law in which you need help; you'll get a list of ten lawyers in your area
- when you have a court appearance, ask the lawyer in the court helping people (also known as the duty counsel lawyer) for a referral list
- go to the Law Society of Upper Canada online service and choose to make an online request (srs.lsuc.on.ca/srs/). You will arrive at LSUC's referral page. Click on "find it here" to arrive at an FAQ page. Scroll to the bottom of that page, choose "next" and fill in the next few pages. Make sure to specify that you are looking for a lawyer, not a paralegal. You will get an email with the names of lawyers you can call.
- call the LSUC telephone crisis line if you cannot use its online service (because, for instance, you are in custody, in a shelter or in a remote community): **1-855-947-5255** or **416-947-5255**
- ask for referrals from your local community legal clinic (find one here: legalaid.on.ca/clinics)

HOW TO USE YOUR CERTIFICATE

You can give your certificate to any lawyer you choose who accepts legal aid certificates (not all lawyers do). That certificate is for a specific issue or case – not future legal issues if they arise.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LAWYER

These questions can help you decide on the best possible person:

- What area of law is your specialty? Are you a criminal lawyer? Family lawyer? Refugee lawyer?
- How much experience with or knowledge about my kind of case do you have?
- Here is what I hope will happen – is this realistic?
- What are my legal options?
- Will someone else in your office handle an important part of my case, such as appearing in court?
- Where is your office?
- How can I contact you?

A FEW OTHER TIPS:

- **Make sure that the lawyer you choose is right for you. Legal Aid Ontario rarely allows you to change your lawyer once you hire one.**
- **Only give your certificate, or send your certificate number, to the lawyer you want to hire. Once you've done that, you have hired him or her.**
- If lawyers approach you when you're in court, it's up to you whether you hire them. You are free to choose any lawyer.

- Look for a lawyer you can trust to tell you all the facts about your case, stay on top of it as it proceeds, and advise you on your best options.
- You may need to meet with a few lawyers before you find one who best meets your needs.

PLANNING FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

Before and during your first meeting:

- Bring all of your court papers.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask.
- Be prepared to explain your legal issues clearly, and limit the number of emails you send and telephone calls you make. Your certificate gives your lawyer specific hours for each stage of your case. The time spent on emails and talking to you counts toward these hours and uses time that the lawyer could spend preparing for your case.
- Bring along paper, so you can write down what the lawyer tells you.
- Bring someone to translate if the lawyer does not have an interpreter.
- Discuss how and when you will get in touch after this meeting.
- Ask whether someone else will handle an important part of your case, such as appearing in court.
- If you do not understand something, ask for an explanation.

You can expect your lawyer to explain:

- the laws that apply to your legal case
- your rights
- the court process
- how long it may take to resolve your legal case
- the range of possible results that you can expect
- the risks related to the plea you choose to make (if it's a criminal case)
- what's going to happen next

Call ahead if you cannot attend your appointment, and make another date.