

**Meeting of Legal Aid Ontario  
French language services  
advisory committee on  
April 25, 2017**



LEGAL AID ONTARIO  

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# 1 Committee members

John McCamus (Chair), Patrice Cormier, Marie-Claude Gaudreault, Josée Guindon, Madeleine Hébert, Ayana Carla Hutchinson, Marie-Josée Lafleur, Andrée-Anne Martel, Aissa Nauthoo, Vicky Ringuette, Christian St-Onge, Leonie Tchatat, Michel Robillard (LAO Board Liaison)

## 1.1 Guest

Alexandra Waite

## 1.2 Interpreter

Violaine Tourny

# 2 Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

# 3 Minutes, October 3, 2016

The minutes of the October 3, 2016 meeting were adopted.

# 4 Legal Aid Ontario business planning slide deck and discussion

The Chair presented highlights of the [Legal Aid Ontario Board Advisory Committees Spring 2017 Meetings: Legal Aid Ontario Updates and Environmental Scan](#) slide deck.

# 5 French language services update and discussion

Legal Aid Ontario's program manager, French language services, presented the French language services update to the committee, noting that members had received a copy of the 2016/17 annual report of the strategic plan for French language services in the justice sector. This report was presented at the annual Francophone stakeholders meeting in February 2017, and was well received.

Highlights of 2016/17 were reviewed.

Legal Aid Ontario continues to work to increase its French language services capacity, and is hiring bilingual staff even in non-designated positions. Legal Aid Ontario evaluates its staff capacity, and capacity of staff who have been evaluated as advanced or superior in terms of their linguistic skills, whether or not in designated positions, represent the equivalent of 90 percent of all designated positions.

Legal Aid Ontario continues to focus on student placement opportunities in clinics. Funding was provided in 2016/17 for articling students at the Prescott Russell clinic and the student legal aid clinic in Ottawa. The clinic work environment is very positive for student development, and clinics are doing their share to provide students with a good work experience. There have also been work placements for students from the Law Practice Program and for paralegal students from La Cité.

Training is a crucial part of Legal Aid Ontario's French language services strategy. This year, Legal Aid Ontario sent 14 staff lawyers to participate in the Ministry of the Attorney General's French Language Institute for Professional Development program for criminal lawyers, which includes a workshop specifically for Legal Aid Ontario duty counsel. Demand to participate in this program has exceeded capacity. There is strong demand at Legal Aid Ontario for all language courses, including online courses.

Legal Aid Ontario and many clinics carry out outreach to inform stakeholders and the community about the availability of services in French. Legal Aid Ontario provides ongoing funding to the Réseau francophone des cliniques, to support document translation and resources to facilitate the provision of legal representation in French. This year, Legal Aid Ontario provided police services across Ontario with an updated form on accessing the Brydges hotline for persons in police detention.

Legal Aid Ontario continues to enhance French language services, often through dynamic partnerships. With Canada-Ontario project funding, Legal Aid Ontario has been working in partnership with the Association of French Speaking Jurists of Ontario, the Centre Francophone de Toronto and Justice for Children and Youth to enhance French language services legal services for youth. A new video on the topic of cyber-bullying has been introduced in collaboration with the CALACS francophone d'Ottawa.

Clinic partnerships and networks are doing a lot to expand the reach of French language services. One example is Centre Francophone de Toronto and the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly working together to expand services in French for seniors. The French language services legal clinic network in the southwest has welcomed two new partner clinics, the Mississauga and Guelph-Waterloo clinics.

Legal Aid Ontario has introduced a bilingual immigration advice hotline for staff and per diem duty counsel lawyers who are assisting a client who wishes to plead guilty. The hotline

provides access to an immigration lawyer who can identify the potential immigration consequences of making a guilty plea so that this information can in turn be provided to the client.

Legal Aid Ontario integrates consideration of French language services into its planning processes in order to be proactive rather than reactive in responding to French language service needs. French language services requirements in clinic funding agreements and contracts are reviewed on an ongoing basis. This is especially important as clinics are developing and implementing new collaborative projects to provide services in new areas of law. French language services is also integrated into consultations and initiatives that support Legal Aid Ontario's strategies. For example, outreach and consultations to support the development of Legal Aid Ontario's Racialized Communities Strategy will include the Francophone community. Some of this consultation has already taken place and has been integrated into strategy development.

Legal Aid Ontario will keep working to improve its capacity through bilingual recruitment and training. September is the month when French language services is highlighted in orientation activities for new staff at Legal Aid Ontario.

Legal Aid Ontario will be reviewing the French language services content on its website and intranet, and the committee's suggestions for improvement are welcome.

Legal Aid Ontario continues to work on its service models, and to seek partnerships with clinics and others, to enhance the availability of services in French. The new electronic duty counsel worksheet will be fully deployed in French and English by the end of December 2017.

It was noted that work is ongoing to develop the French language services model for Markham, which is the newest designated area under the *French Language Services Act* (FLSA).

Committee members provided input and advice. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of every member.

- The committee commended Legal Aid Ontario on its report and on the work that has been done.
- The progress that has been made in developing capacity within the clinic system is impressive. Clinics that had no capacity to meet the demand for services in French are moving towards being able to meet that need.
- The importance of collaboration and sharing linguistic resources was stressed. The co-location of specialty clinics in Toronto was identified as a positive move that will produce many opportunities for collaboration.

- Members noted the recent introduction of the province's basic income pilot for low-income families. The pilot has been introduced in three communities and will affect 4,000 randomly chosen households in those communities. Legal Aid Ontario is aware of this project and will be working with the Ministry of the Attorney General to determine the best way to support the pilot.
- The committee identified an increase in the number of women, including immigrant women, coming forward to seek assistance from women's centres and shelters, including in relation to sexual assault matters. There has been a sizable increase in the number of clients who are trying to move out of the sex trade. These people have no resources and may not be eligible for housing while, at the same time, the shelter environment may not work for them.
- It was noted that changes have been made that have an impact on access to government housing, especially for victims of domestic violence.
- There has been an increase in the number of refugee applications from Francophone clients. The number of people arriving from Haiti as refugees has increased, and there is information coming from the community that many Haitians who are now in the U.S. may be making their way to Canada as refugees.
- There is a high volume of family law clients who need services in French.
- Since last year, there has been an increase in employer demand for paralegals who can work in French. Anglophone employers are also active recruiters for bilingual staff.
- Centre Francophone de Toronto is supporting Advocacy Centre for the Elderly in meeting the needs of Francophone seniors. Centre Francophone de Toronto is also sourcing out existing resources in French for the LGBTQ community.
- The Ottawa Legal Information Center (an Association of French Speaking Jurists of Ontario project) received funding from the Attorney General's Office to establish a toll-free telephone line across the province. Launched in October 2016, the toll-free line provides legal information in English and French across the province, particularly outside of Ottawa. Thirty percent of the Center's clients receive services by telephone.
- It was noted that the French language services capacity of Legal Aid Ontario staff in the Hamilton courts is not obvious. It would help if duty counsel wore some sign (a pin, for example) to identify them as having French language services capacity.
- It is important for Legal Aid Ontario to have accurate data about the demand for services in French. Clients may not request services in French if they do not know that these services are available. Legal aid service providers should indicate to clients at the outset whether they are able to provide services to them in French

## 6 Action items

1. Legal Aid Ontario will explore what can be done to increase clients' awareness of the availability of legal aid services in French.

## 7 Other business

None raised.