

Fact sheet

Finding the right legal aid lawyer

Financially eligible clients with legal matters covered by Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) may be able to apply for a certificate, which covers the cost of a lawyer for a certain number of hours.

Contact us

Toll-free: **1-800-668-8258**

TTY service for the hearing impaired: **1-866-641-8867**

Service is available Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

www.legalaid.on.ca

Finding a legal aid lawyer

- visit **legalaid.on.ca/find** and type in your location and the area of law you need help in—a list of lawyers in your area will show up
- ask the lawyer at court (also known as duty counsel) for a referral list
- go to the Law Society Referral Service (LSRS) at **<https://lso.ca/public-resources/finding-a-lawyer-or-paralegal/law-society-referral-service>**
- ask for referrals from your local community legal clinic

Choosing the right lawyer

Make sure the lawyer you choose is right for you—LAO rarely allows you to change your lawyer once you hire one.

The following questions can help you decide on a lawyer:

- What area of law do you specialize in?
- 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 in your office handle an important part of my case, such as appearing in court?
- Where is your office?
- How can I contact you?

You may need to meet with a few lawyers before you find one who best meets your needs.

Planning for 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 calls you make—your certificate gives your lawyer a certain number of hours for each stage of your case. Time spent on emails and talking to you counts towards 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 doesn't 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 don't understand something, ask for an explanation.

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

What to expect

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 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

Complaints

If you experience any of the issues below, please contact our Complaints department by phone at **1-866-874-9786** or by email at **complaints@lao.on.ca**.

- ✘ If your lawyer asks you for money; your certificate means that LAO will pay your lawyer.
- ✘ If your lawyer behaves, through inappropriate words or actions, in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- ✘ If your lawyer unnecessarily rushes you into making a decision.
- ✘ If your lawyer guarantees success (no lawyer can do that).