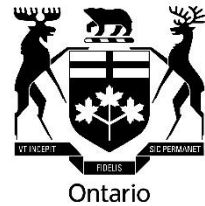


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Our Reference #: M-2020-11430

October 1, 2020

Mr. Charles Harnick
Chair, Board of Directors
Legal Aid Ontario

Email: harnicc@lao.on.ca

Mr. David Field
President and CEO
Legal Aid Ontario

Email: fieldd@lao.on.ca

Dear Mr. Harnick and Mr. Field:

As you begin planning for 2021–22, I am pleased to write to you in your capacities as Chair of the Board of Directors and President and Chief Executive Officer of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) to provide you with a letter setting out expectations and direction for LAO in the year ahead. Pursuant to the requirements of the *Agencies and Appointments Directive*, this letter sets out my expectations for LAO for the 2021–22 fiscal year.

Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to Ontarians. The work that you and your fellow board members undertake to establish the goals, objectives, and strategic direction for LAO ensures access to justice for low-income Ontarians.

I understand that this is a challenging time for Ontarians, particularly vulnerable individuals, many of whom are looking to LAO for assistance with their critical legal issues. The year ahead will continue to be difficult as we work towards a gradual reopening of the province. That is why it is critical that LAO focuses on delivering the essential, high-quality legal aid services that Ontarians expect and rely on, while also managing within its allocation. During this period of responsible fiscal management across government, I expect that LAO will continue to adhere to applicable government directives and policies and ensure transparency and accountability in reporting.

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I recognize that the current focus is addressing the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it is also important that LAO moves forward with key initiatives. The government will continue to look to LAO to implement the current legislative requirements of the *Legal Aid Services Act, 2020* in a timely and appropriate manner.

It is important that the board's direction is consistent with government priorities, your agency mandate, key policies, and directives. I thank both of you for your willingness to serve.

As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of Ontarians by being efficient, effective, and providing value for money to taxpayers. This includes:

1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management

- operating within your agency's allocations
- identifying and pursuing opportunities for revenue generation, innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability
- identifying and pursuing efficiencies and savings
- complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization, Realty Interim Measures, and Agency Office Location Criteria

2. Transparency and Accountability

- abiding by applicable government directives and policies and ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting
- adhering to requirements of the Agencies and Appointment Directive, and responding to audit findings, where applicable
- identifying appropriate skills, knowledge, and experience needed to effectively support the board's role in agency governance and accountability

3. Risk Management

- developing and implementing an effective process for the identification, assessment, and mitigation of risks, including planning for and responding to emergency situations such as COVID-19

4. Workforce Management

- optimizing your agency's workforce to enable efficient and effective fulfilment of government priorities, while enhancing customer service standards
- streamlining back office functions to ensure that all available resources are redirected towards the critical front-line services that Ontarians depend upon

5. Data Collection

- improving how the agency uses data in decision-making, information sharing and, reporting, including by leveraging available or new data solutions to inform outcome-based reporting and improve service delivery

- supporting transparency and data sharing with the ministry, as appropriate
- collecting race-based data to identify systemic racism and advance racial equality

6. Digital Delivery and Customer Service

- exploring and implementing digitization or digital modernization strategies for the provision of services online and continuing to meet and exceed customer service standards through transition
- using a variety of approaches or tools to ensure service delivery in all situations, including COVID-19

In addition to these government-wide priorities, I expect LAO to focus on:

1. Achieving its Core Mandate and Modernization

- delivering core, essential, and high-quality legal aid services via certificates, duty counsel, and community legal clinics that meet clients' needs in a cost-effective and efficient manner
- reviewing programs and expenditures monthly to identify areas that do not align with LAO's core mandate and consider opportunities to achieve savings
- modernizing core legal aid services and streamlining processes in the legal aid sector to reduce duplication, achieve savings and efficiencies and expand access to justice across the province

2. Responsible and Sustainable Management of Funds

- providing consistent, comprehensive, and monthly financial forecasts that are consistent with OPS forecasting practices and in a format agreed to by both organizations
- prioritizing essential services and activities that align with LAO's core mandate when considering the management and distribution of funds
- ensuring value for money while providing efficient, effective, and high-quality legal aid services
- ensuring that community legal clinics have appropriate, sustainable funding to deliver vital poverty law services to low-income Ontarians
- identifying innovative approaches for revenue generation to address unpredictable and unstable revenues from the Law Foundation of Ontario

3. Open and Transparent Engagement

- developing a consultation approach, in consultation with my ministry, that includes transparent and substantive engagement with key stakeholders and partners, including community legal clinics
- sharing policy-making and rule-making processes with relevant stakeholders as part of the Legal Aid Modernization Project

4. **Timeliness of Deliverables**

- ensuring timely implementation of deliverables, including those relating to the Legal Aid Modernization Project
- undertaking the necessary project management and rule development to ensure the timely implementation of the *Legal Aid Services Act, 2020* in 2021 with a targeted implementation by the second quarter of fiscal 2021–2022.

Through these measures, we can continue to ensure that LAO is continuing to fulfill its mandate of promoting access to justice for low-income Ontarians.

I thank both of you and your fellow board members for your continued support, and for your valuable contributions. Should either of you have any questions/concerns, please feel free to contact Ms. Jane Mallen, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division, either by telephone at 647-622-5147 or by email at Jane.N.Mallen@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Downey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends under the first name.

Doug Downey
Attorney General