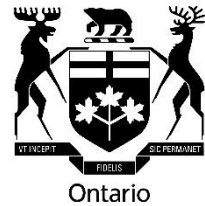


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Our Reference #: M-2021-13862

September 20, 2021

Mr. Charles Harnick
Chair
Legal Aid Ontario
40 Dundas Street West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON
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Dear Mr. Harnick:

As you begin planning for 2022-23, I am pleased to write to you in your capacity as Chair of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Pursuant to the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for LAO for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to people in Ontario. 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 people in Ontario. It is important that this direction is consistent with government priorities, your agency mandate, key policies and directives and my directions, where appropriate. I thank you for your willingness to serve.

As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of people in Ontario by being efficient, effective, and providing value-for-money to taxpayers. Our government's primary focus is to protect every life and every job we possibly can. Without healthy people, we cannot have a healthy economy.

This includes:

1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management

- operating within your agency's financial allocations
- identifying and pursuing opportunities for revenue generation, innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability
- complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization and Realty Interim Measures for agency office space
- leveraging and meeting benchmarked outcomes for compensation strategies and directives
- working with the ministry, where appropriate, to advance the [*Ontario Onwards Action Plan*](#)

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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 Appointments Directive, accounting standards and practices, and the *Public Service of Ontario Act* ethical framework, 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 health and other emergency situations, including but not limited to COVID-19
- developing a continuity of operations plan that identifies time critical/essential services and personnel

4. Workforce Management

- optimizing your organizational capacity to support the best possible public service delivery
- modernizing and redeploying resources to priority areas when or where they are needed

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 privacy requirements of data work and data sharing with the ministry, as appropriate

6. Digital Delivery and Customer Service

- exploring and implementing digitization or digital modernization strategies for online service delivery and continuing to meet and exceed customer service standards through transition
- adopting digital approaches, such as user research, agile development and product management

7. Diversity and Inclusion

- developing and encouraging diversity and inclusion initiatives promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace
- demonstrating leadership of an inclusive environment free of harassment
- adopting an inclusion engagement process to ensure all voices are heard to inform policies and decision-making

8. COVID-19 Recovery

- identifying and pursuing service delivery methods (digital or other) that have evolved since the start of COVID-19
- supporting the recovery efforts from 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, Indigenous legal services organizations, and community legal clinics that meet clients' needs in a cost-effective and efficient manner, and also providing support for the ministry's strategy to reduce court backlog, set out below, appreciating this goes beyond LAO's core mandate
- reviewing programs and expenditures monthly to 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 LAO manage within its budget allocation
- ensuring that community legal clinics and other service providers under the *Legal Aid Services Act, 2020* 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 that includes transparent and substantive engagement with key stakeholders and partners, including community legal clinics, Indigenous communities, and other racialized communities
- sharing policy-making and rule-making processes with relevant stakeholders in accordance with the *Legal Aid Services Act, 2020*

4. Supporting the Court Recovery Process

- working collaboratively with the ministry as it plans and executes strategies to reduce the court backlog

5. Equity, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation

- engaging, collaborating, and supporting Indigenous, racialized and marginalized communities to address the unique systemic barriers that they face in the justice system
- working collaboratively to respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's* “calls to action”
- ensuring that the collection of any race-based data is in accordance with the requirements and principles of the *Anti-Racism Act, 2017* and Ontario’s Anti-Racism Data Standards
- developing and supporting distinct policies and programs that address the over-representation of Indigenous and Black people in the criminal justice system and child welfare system
- ensuring that digitization and other modernization strategies do not create access to justice barriers for marginalized people who may not have access to technology.

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

I thank you and your fellow Board Members for your continued support, and for your valuable contributions. Should 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.

Doug Downey
Attorney General