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Our Reference Number: M-2024-8933

October 18, 2024

Stephen Pengelly  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Legal Aid Ontario  
[pengellys@lao.on.ca](mailto:pengellys@lao.on.ca)

Janet Budgell  
President and CEO  
Legal Aid Ontario  
[BudgellJ@lao.on.ca](mailto:BudgellJ@lao.on.ca)

Dear Steve Pengelly and Janet Budgell:

I am pleased to share our government's 2025-26 priorities for Legal Aid Ontario (LAO).

Agencies are a part of government and are expected to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario and ensure that they provide value for money to taxpayers. Agencies are also required to adhere to government policies and directives.

Per the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, agencies are required to align goals, objectives and strategic direction with our government's priorities and direction. As Chair, you must ensure that LAO's business plan demonstrates the agency's plans in fulfilling the expectations and government priorities below and that progress and achievements are reported through your annual report. Compliance with these requirements is reported to Treasury Board/ Management Board of Cabinet annually.

This letter sets out my expectations for 2025-26 that LAO is innovative, sustainable and accountable through the following direction:

## **Innovative**

- a. Simplify client/customer interactions.
- b. Expand and optimize digital service offerings.
- c. Improve client/customer satisfaction.
- d. Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making.

## **Sustainable**

- e. Strengthen public service delivery by optimizing organizational capacity and directing existing resources to priority areas.
- f. Use Public Resources efficiently and
  - i. Operate within agency's financial allocations.
  - ii. Prudently and responsibly manage workforce size. Where an agency requires a material increase in workforce size, the agency must provide the Minister with an HR plan for approval that provides the rationale based on government priorities and/or agency mandate.

## **Accountable**

- g. Develop and report on outcome-focused performance measures to effectively monitor and measure performance.
- h. Protect individual, business or organization data by actively managing data and cybersecurity and reporting Artificial Intelligence uses.
- i. Report all high risks including effective mitigation plans.
- j. Align hybrid work policies with the OPS and identify and assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint and find cost reductions.
  - i. Collaborate with MOI to identify office space opportunities.
  - ii. Align with the MBC Realty Directive and the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) Standards.

- k. Develop and encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace.

These are the government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies. Please see the attached guide for further details of each priority and the accompanying performance measures that can be utilised if measurements are not currently in place.

I am also sharing several priorities specific to LAO:

1. LAO is expected to continue to prioritize supporting the court and tribunal recovery process, working collaboratively with the Ministry as it plans and executes strategies to reduce the backlog in the courts.
2. LAO is expected to continue to work together with MAG on options to raise the financial threshold for legal aid eligibility that will enable more people to access duty counsel services at court and enable more individuals facing criminal charges to be able to hire a lawyer funded by legal aid.
3. LAO is expected to continue to advance work in IT upgrades, ensuring LAO is well position to adapt to and combat cyber risks, and ensure the security and integrity of LAO's critical systems.
4. LAO is expected to continue to prioritize addressing the 2022-23 mandate review recommendations, including specific recommendations regarding the following:
  - independently proposing or implementing new initiatives in overseeing the provision of legal services
  - continue working to improve oversight of legal clinics
  - increasing innovative capacity and exploring innovative service delivery models
  - making improvements to performance tracking
  - continuing to work with MAG to improve financial sustainability and
  - further explore how to better attract and retain talent.
5. LAO is also expected to continue to work together with the Ministry of the Attorney General to address audit review recommendations.

At our next meeting, I would be pleased to discuss these priorities, and I look forward to hearing how they will be reflected in the agency's upcoming business plan and in ongoing agency operations.

Thank you and your fellow board members for your continued commitment to LAO. Your

work and ongoing support is invaluable to our government and the people of Ontario.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jane Mallen, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division, at [jane.n.mallen@ontario.ca](mailto:jane.n.mallen@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Downey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Doug" and last name "Downey" clearly distinguishable.

Doug Downey  
Attorney General

Enclosure

c: Jane Mallen, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division