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October 3, 2025

Mr. Stephen Pengelly
Chair of the Board of Directors
Legal Aid Ontario
730-20 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2H1

Dear Mr. Pengelly:

I am pleased to share our government's 2026-27 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. In a time of economic uncertainty, agencies play a critical role in supporting our commitment to Protect Ontario by improving service delivery, driving innovation, and ensuring responsible stewardship of public resources – all while adhering to government policies and directives.

In accordance with the [Agencies and Appointments Directive](#), agencies are required to align their goals, objectives and strategic direction with our government's priorities. As Chair, you are responsible for ensuring that LAO's business plan clearly demonstrates how the agency will fulfill these expectations. Progress and achievements must be reported through your annual report, and compliance with these requirements will be monitored and reported to Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet annually.

This letter sets out my expectations for 2026-27, with a focus on how LAO will contribute to protecting Ontario by delivering better services and driving innovation and value for money.

Protect Ontario

1. Expand domestic partnerships within Canada, to promote the development of supply chains and economic opportunities across Canada and support economic resilience, particularly in light of ongoing U.S. tariff threats and economic uncertainty.
2. Procure from Ontario and Canadian businesses whenever feasible.

3. Provide economic relief for Ontario families, consumers and businesses by freezing government fees and fares, unless approved by the oversight Minister.

Deliver Better Services

4. Focus on a user-centered client/customer experience by simplifying interactions, improving satisfaction, and expanding and optimizing digital service offerings.
5. Identify opportunities to enhance efficiency, improve services, drive innovation, and achieve cost savings for the people of Ontario, including through the use of AI and other advanced technologies.
6. Eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape by applying lean methodologies or other modalities to achieve operational efficiency.

Drive Innovation & Value for Money

7. Find innovative solutions to use public resources efficiently and to effectively deliver on the agency's mandate while operating within agency's financial allocation, supported by accurate financial reporting, effective internal controls, and proactive fraud management practices.
8. Manage agency workforce with careful responsibility to stabilize expenditures and preserve long-term financial viability by:
 - strictly adhering to the hiring control parameters, including ceasing hiring for non-business critical and non-public-facing positions, including the use of consultants;
 - operating within a defined maximum workforce size (including consultants);
 - ensuring compliance with the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act (BPSECA); and
 - enhancing productivity and efficiency by using technology wherever possible.
9. Create a span of control policy that recognizes different streams of work within the organization and sets minimum span of control benchmarks and provide it to the Minister for approval by March 31st, 2026.
10. Provide to your oversight minister by October 1, 2025, the amended human resource policy, guideline or directive that adheres to the OPS in-office standard of four (4) days per week effective October 20, 2025, and five (5) days per week effective January 5, 2026, and work with your oversight ministry to address any office space constraints.

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 outcomes and 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 courts.
2. LAO is expected to report back on the implementation of the increase to the financial threshold for legal aid eligibility, that has enabled more people to access duty counsel services at court and enabled 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 positioned to meet its operational needs and to adapt to and combat cyber risks, and ensure the security, integrity, and efficacy of LAO's IT systems.
4. As LAO released its new five-year Strategic Plan in April 2025, the agency is expected to continue to work on advancing the goals and priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan and report back to the ministry on progress.
5. 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 exploring how to better attract and retain talent.

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 Legal Aid Ontario. 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 Tom McKinlay, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division at tom.mckinlay@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: Aileen Page, Chief Executive Officer, Legal Aid Ontario
Abby Dwosh, Vice President, Corporate Services and Chief Administrative
Officer, Legal Aid Ontario
Tom McKinlay, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division