



August 28, 2019

Legal Aid Ontario

Charles Harnik, Board Chair, LAO, and

Shane Hakim, Executive Assistant

Sent by email only to harnicc@lao.on.ca and HakimS@lao.on.ca

Dear Charles Harnik and Shane Hakim,

Legal Aid Ontario is faced with a number of challenges. The question of how to deliver quality services to individuals across a broad range of topics in a cost effective manner is complex, and the solution or solutions even more so. Access to justice is an important part of providing a service that is affordable, accessible in the clients' community, and available when it is needed. There are many areas in which few or no legal aid lawyers exist, leaving clients lost and bewildered when they find themselves involved in a court process.

Some thoughts on increasing the availability of legal aid services are:

1. Eliminate support for those who can afford to pay for private legal advice, or, increase the legal aid fee according to client's income, such that low or zero income earners can get the help they need when they need it. Low or no income should not eliminate the ability to receive good legal advice and representation.
2. Even when clients do not meet the income threshold, paying for private legal advice could still be out of reach, so offering a service on a sliding fee scale geared to income could be a solution for many people who are falling through the cracks.
3. By encouraging the use of mediation prior to a court process being started, the amount of hours needed by a legal aid lawyer are reduced. The court located or off-site mediators do most of the leg work, and the lawyer's time is reserved for consultation, legal advice, and review of mediated agreements or points of agreement.
4. Clients need help turning their mediated agreements into separation agreements. Reducing or eliminating court processes will free up time that can be spent producing separation agreements for clients.

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We applaud your initiative in holding consultative discussions with various stakeholders around the province. Each region faces its own challenges, and solutions that work in southern Ontario may not make sense for northern Ontario. We would be happy to discuss these and any other options more fully at any time and wish you success as you seek to streamline processes.

We thank you for this opportunity and look forward to continued dialogue.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

For,
Kathy Dunne
President,
ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILY MEDIATION