



The Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario calls on government to rescind cuts to community legal clinics

Toronto (June 12, 2019) – The Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO) condemns the cuts in community legal clinic services to the province’s poorest and most vulnerable people, flowing from the Ontario government’s spring budget. The April 11th provincial budget announced a 30% decrease in legal aid funding. Today, Legal Aid Ontario implemented the cuts to the clinic system. These cuts will result in:

- A decrease to the clinic system budget of approximately \$15 million, or 16%;
- Deep funding cuts to those clinics that engage in test case and law reform work, of up to 33% of their budgets;
- Loss of funding to clinics located in the City of Toronto of up to 10 %
- Loss of funding to other clinics of varying smaller amounts
- The cutback or elimination of many of the central supports (i.e. learning and training, knowledge sharing, client service coordination, etc.) that clinics rely on to do their work and maintain a high quality of services.

In addition, the description of these cuts states that LAO is no longer “prioritizing” the law reform, and community development aspects of the clinic mandate, and directs clinics to focus instead on individual cases and summary advice. Moreover, further cuts are anticipated next year, as well as a review of the community clinic model.

Since the cuts to legal aid funding were announced, the Attorney General, Caroline Mulroney, has been assuring everyone that they will not have an impact on client service. The ACLCO’s co-chair, Gary Newhouse states, “We now know that these statements were false. As predicted, the cuts imposed on clinics today will have a major impact on clinic law services, and on low income people in Ontario”.

Although all communities will suffer some loss of services, the Ford government has decided to target their cuts based on ideological and personal motivations. The cuts focus on:

- The ability of clinics to take test cases and advance law reform to help low-income people to challenge unfair government initiatives. This is because the provincial government desperately wants to shut down any effective opposition to reshaping Ontario in the way Doug Ford wants;
- Clinics in the City of Toronto. This is because of this government’s unquenchable antipathy towards the City of Toronto.

The ACLCO’s Executive Director, Lenny Abramowicz states, “The fact that the cuts were targeted in this way, and not simply applied across the board, demonstrates that they are motivated by politics and by personal grievance – these cuts have nothing to do with achieving efficiencies or greater productivity. In fact, engaging in law reform activities or doing one test case, rather than proceeding with hundreds of individual cases, is the most effective and efficient way of providing legal services.”

As a result of the cutbacks announced today legal aid services will not be available to thousands of low-income Ontarians, especially those located in the City of Toronto. And at the same time, Doug Ford will have severely curtailed the most effective way of ensuring that government initiatives do not discriminate against Ontario’s poorest and most vulnerable. Unfortunately, this provincial government sees this as a win-win proposition. The losers are the people of Ontario.

The ACLCO is the representative body of Ontario’s community legal clinics, acts in a leadership role to advocate for sustainable legal aid services, and is recognized throughout Canada and internationally as expert in community-based poverty law services.

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