

June 13, 2019

By Email

Hon. Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Bill.Morneau@canada.ca

Hon. David Lametti, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
David.Lametti@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Morneau and Minister Lametti,

Re: Urgent Support For Legal Aid In Ontario

OCASI is writing to you to ask for urgent federal government financial support for Legal Aid in Ontario – specifically Community Legal Clinics. We have just learned of further provincial funding cuts to Ontario Legal Aid, and primarily to Community Legal Clinics. They are simply devastating.

The cuts appear to be aimed primarily at specialized clinics – clinics that provide specialized legal services to highly vulnerable populations – and neighbourhood clinics in Toronto. The Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) and Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario (ACTO) each have their funding cut by 25%. The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) which assists low-income people and disadvantaged communities to seek redress for harmful impact of pollution on their health and environment has its funding cut by 35%. Parkdale Community Legal Clinic which has assisted low-income and disadvantaged residents with housing, worker's rights and more as well as effective community organizing on these concerns, is facing a funding cut of 45% over two years – a cut of over \$1 million.

We are also deeply concerned that while ethno-specific legal clinics such as Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, Black Legal Action Centre, and Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples have so far faced only a smaller percentage of Legal Aid funding cuts, they may face equal or more severe cuts in the future as the specialized clinics above.

OCASI member agencies rely on Community Legal Clinics to ensure that their low-income and disadvantaged clients have access to justice and their legal rights are respected. The ethno-specific legal clinics are especially important in ensuring justice is not denied particularly for refugees and immigrants who may be unfamiliar with Canada's justice system and may face

OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

110 Eglinton Ave. West, Suite 200
Toronto, Ontario
M4R 1A3

Telephone: 416-322-4950
Fax: 416-322-8084

generalmail@ocasi.org
www.ocasi.org
www.settlement.org



other systemic barriers, and find a greater level of comfort and confidence in seeking legal advice and aid from a Clinic that understands cultural and linguistic context.

We have learned that the Ontario government is undertaking a review of the Community Legal Clinic system, and we are deeply concerned that this may lead to further funding cuts, or changes that will have a devastating impact on low-income and disadvantaged communities. This is not idle speculation. We have already seen a complete withdrawal of support by the Province for refugee and immigration legal services of Legal Aid Ontario.

We raised these concerns with Minister Lametti at a meeting a few weeks ago. We reiterate those concerns in the strongest and most urgent terms possible.

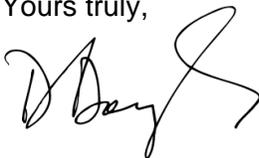
The legal aids cuts in Toronto have a disproportionate impact on racialized communities, immigrants and refugees. The cuts in general are causing deep concern in Toronto and in communities across Ontario.

The federal government has committed to a national Poverty Reduction Strategy, and agreed to develop a new Anti-Racism strategy for Canada. The government has identified systemic racism in the criminal justice system as a key issue to be addressed in a future anti-racism strategy. Adequate and stable legal aid funding is foundational to both the Poverty Reduction Strategy and a future Anti-Racism strategy. It will simply not be possible for the government to move forward on either one of these strategies without a fundamental commitment to ensure access to justice for low-income and disadvantaged residents.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights recommended in its study, "[Access to Justice – Part 2: Legal Aid](#)" tabled in the House of Commons on October 30, 2017, that the federal government should increase its contribution to provincial and territorial legal aid. It specifically recommended that legal plans across Canada should expand the role of specialty clinics and law schools to increase access to justice.

We urge you again to urgently provide federal government financial support for Legal Aid in Ontario – specifically Community Legal Clinics.

Yours truly,



Debbie Douglas
Executive Director

CC:

Hon. Ahmed D. Hussen, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Hon. Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism

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Hon. Arif Virani, P.C., M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney
General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions

Hon. Adam Vaughan, P.C., M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children
and Social Development

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and
Multiculturalism

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