

September 3, 2020

The Honourable David Lametti
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
284 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0H8

Via email: david.lametti@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Lametti,

RE: URGENT NEED FOR FUNDING FOR LEGAL AID ONTARIO

I am writing to you as the President of the Toronto Lawyers Association to underscore Legal Aid Ontario's (LAO) urgent need for funding due to a COVID-19 related economic downturn.

As you know, LAO receives funding not only from the federal and provincial governments, but also from the Law Foundation of Ontario. The Law Foundation's revenue comes from the interest earned on the balances in mixed trust accounts managed by Ontario lawyers and paralegals. The Law Foundation directs 75 per cent of this interest revenue to LAO. In the past fiscal year, the Law Foundation provided LAO with \$91 million—approximately 20 per cent of LAO's total funding.

The Law Foundation's revenue levels are highly dependent on interest rates and real estate activity in Ontario, both of which have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In these circumstances, the Law Foundation's revenue has dropped and will continue to do so, as will the Foundation's financial contribution to LAO. The interest rate cut alone will likely result in a decrease in the Law Foundation's contribution of at least \$60 million.

We are asking that you work with the province to address this shortfall. The federal government can pre-empt dire consequences for LAO and the low-income Ontarians who depend on LAO for legal advice and representation at critical points in their lives. It is our understanding that the Ontario government, is prepared to match your government's contribution to LAO up to \$30 million.

Accessible legal aid services are crucial to a fair justice system and can have life-altering impacts on the individuals and families who rely on them.

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I am available at your convenience should you have any questions.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BH' with a stylized flourish.

Brett Harrison
President
Toronto Lawyers Association

cc: Terry Brandon, Legal Aid Chair, FOLA
Katie Robinette, Executive Director, FOLA, katie.robinette@fola.ca