

November 1, 2019

CL 18-2019, October 17, 2019

DISTRIBUTION LIST

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

Re: Proposed Cuts to Legal Aid Ontario Budget

Regional Council, at its meeting held on October 17, 2019, passed the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Niagara Community Legal Clinic is a not-for-profit agency providing access to justice and vital service to low-income Niagara citizens in civil law matters, including landlord-tenant disputes, Ontario Disability Support Payment (ODSP) appeals, pension appeals, workplace injury/WSIB compensation, consumer law protection, refugee assistance, migrant worker support, human rights law, power of attorney matters, and wills and estates for low-income seniors;

WHEREAS the Niagara Community Legal Clinic is funded by Legal Aid Ontario, an arm's-length agency of the Ministry of the Attorney General for Ontario, which (in addition to funding the province's legal clinics) provides much-needed support to low-income people in matters of family law, refugee law, and criminal law;

WHEREAS the two historic Niagara legal clinics – Justice Niagara, founded in 1978, and Niagara North Community Legal Assistance, founded in 1982 – merged on January 1, 2019, to form the Niagara Community Legal Clinic;

WHEREAS Legal Aid funding saves money in the overall justice system budget, in light of the evidence that the cases of self-represented parties (i.e., parties without Legal Aid support) consume significantly greater amounts of expensive court time and/or tribunal time; and

WHEREAS the Province cut approximately \$70 million from the Legal Aid Ontario budget in 2019, with approximately \$14.5 million of that being cut from the legal clinic system, and has indicated an intention to cut an additional \$17.3 million from the LAO budget in 2020:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That Regional Chair Jim Bradley **BE DIRECTED** to send a letter to Ontario Attorney General Doug Downey, on behalf of Regional Council, reading as follows:

"The Region of Niagara is grateful for the work of the Niagara Community Legal Clinic, whose professionals provide meaningful access to justice for low-income people in Niagara. In light of the deep challenges Niagara faces in terms of poverty and lack of sufficient affordable housing, the services that the Niagara Community Legal Clinic provides are truly vital to our community.

It has come to our attention that the Province has proposed additional cuts to the budget of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), the Niagara clinic's funder, to be implemented in 2020. Because our Council deeply values the work of our Niagara Community Legal Clinic, and the supports that LAO provides to citizens facing challenges in family law, criminal law, and refugee law, we request that you not implement any additional cuts to the LAO budget. We also ask that you re-invest in the Legal Aid and clinic systems, so as to address the many barriers to access to justice that our citizens face.

Thank you for your consideration."

2. That this motion and the Chair's letter **BE CIRCULATED** to municipalities throughout Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Yours truly,



Ann-Marie Norio
Regional Clerk

CLK-C 2019-245

Distribution List:

All Municipalities in Ontario
Association of Municipalities of Ontario



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October 21, 2019

The Honourable Doug Downey, Attorney General of Ontario
Ministry of the Attorney General
McMurtry-Scott Building
720 Bay Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Dear Attorney General Downey,

The Region of Niagara is grateful for the work of the Niagara Community Legal Clinic, whose professionals provide meaningful access to justice for low-income people in Niagara. In light of the deep challenges Niagara faces in terms of poverty and lack of sufficient affordable housing, the services that the Niagara Community Legal Clinic provides are truly vital to our community.

It has come to our attention that the Province has proposed additional cuts to the budget of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), the Niagara clinic's funder, to be implemented in 2020. Because our Council deeply values the work of our Niagara Community Legal Clinic, and the supports that LAO provides to citizens facing challenges in family law, criminal law, and refugee law, we request that you not implement any additional cuts to the LAO budget. We also ask that you re-invest in the Legal Aid and clinic systems, so as to address the many barriers to access to justice that our citizens face.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jim Bradley, Chair
Niagara Region