

The following services are available to low-income Ontario residents who need assistance for their legal matters:

Clients in police custody can ask a police officer or other law enforcement agency employee to call an LAO duty counsel lawyer on their behalf. The law enforcement employee can dial LAO's toll-free Brydges Hotline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A duty counsel will return the call to the officer within 45 minutes, and will be forwarded to the accused to speak in private.

Source: http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/about/fact_ataglance.asp

THIS FORM IS PREPARED BY NORTH COURT DUTY COUNSEL OFFICE FOR GENERAL INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY.
IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ABOVE INFORMATION PLEASE CONSULT THE DUTY COUNSEL OFFICE.

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Legal Aid Ontario at a glance

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is responsible for administering the province's legal aid program and providing low-income Ontario residents with high-quality legal aid services in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Established by the *Legal Aid Services Act*, 1998, LAO is an independent but publically-funded and accountable non-profit corporation. It is the second-largest justice agency in Ontario and one of North America's largest providers of legal services.

1-800-668-8258

Services

LAO provides legal assistance province-wide to low-income clients who are eligible for support for their family, criminal or immigration/refugee legal matters. LAO also funds 77 community legal clinics across the province.

- **LAO's central toll-free telephone line.** Call Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Telephone: 1-800-668-8258 (or 416-979-1446 in Toronto). TTY: 1-866-641-8867 (or 416-598-8867 in Toronto). Service is available in over 200 languages, including 18 Aboriginal languages and dialects. Services are also available to people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing, through Bell Relay and TTY.
- **Both LAO's website (www.legalaid.on.ca) and LawFacts.ca** provide in-depth legal information and help navigating the justice system and in-depth legal information.
- **LAO's 56 provincial courthouse offices** provide support for applications, general information, status checks and referrals. More than 80 per cent of LAO's clients, many of whom apply before their first court appearance, receive a same-day decision on their legal aid application from these offices.
- **Ontario's 77 community clinics** offer poverty law services in every part of the province. Thirteen of these are specialty clinics, each dealing with a specific area of law or representing a specific group of people.
- **Legal aid certificates.** LAO's certificate program provides eligible, low-income Ontarians with full representation by a lawyer of their choice for serious legal matters. A certificate is a voucher guaranteeing payment to the lawyer for a certain number of hours for representing the legal aid client.

Duty counsel

Duty counsel are LAO staff lawyers or private bar lawyers (paid by LAO), who provide advice, information and representation for eligible low-income people.

LAO's 1,300 staff and per diem duty counsel lawyers who work at courthouses across the province provide, for more than 1.1 million people each year, advice about legal rights and the court process and help for certain court processes such as adjournments.

They include:

- **Criminal duty counsel** – assist clients at brief court appearances, attend resolution conferences, support people who come to court without a lawyer, set court dates, adjourn matters, help clients make their pleas, and assess the legal services needed to meet clients' needs and the merits of the case; they may also help negotiate appropriate sentences with the Crown and if appropriate, refer people to the certificate program, an LAO staff lawyer or another LAO service delivery option.
- **Family duty counsel** – provide legal services to people who have family law issues such as child custody, support or access, such as providing advice on family law issues, legal rights, obligations, and the court process; helping negotiate and settle family issues; reviewing or preparing court documents to be filed. They may take steps to resolve matters when such steps would be consistent with their professional obligations and the client has given them appropriate instructions. They also play a vital role in referring cases to the appropriate services if a matter requires more preparation time than duty counsel can provide.
- **Mental health duty counsel** – support clients in court, including in all of Ontario's Mental Health courts.
- **Tenant duty counsel** defend financially eligible tenants at [Landlord and Tenant Board](#) hearings.
- **Duty counsel are in other specialized courts** across Ontario, including drug courts, *Gladue* (Aboriginal persons) courts and every youth court.