

● ● ● Legal Aid Ontario: An Overview

Presented Kelsey Fuerst, Manager of Legal Services



About Legal Aid Ontario

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Who we are

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is a board-governed agency of the Ontario government.

How we are funded

LAO is primarily funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG), and receives additional funding from the federal government (for criminal and immigration & refugee law services), the Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO) and client contributions.



Our scope of services

LAO is one of the largest providers of legal aid services in North America, delivering high quality and cost effective services in English and French to almost 1 million low income and frequently highly vulnerable clients each year.

Our role in the justice system

LAO services are essential to the efficient operation of the justice system and we are a key partner in justice sector recovery initiatives.

Funding for entity service providers

LAO provides funding to 71 independent legal clinics, 3 Indigenous legal services organizations and 8 student legal services organizations throughout the province who specialize in clinic law and assist vulnerable Ontarians in accessing legal services.

LAO's mandate

- We promote access to justice by providing high-quality legal aid services that are efficient, effective and accessible.
- Our principles in s.17(2) of the [Legal Aid Services Act, 2020](#) state that legal aid services should:

Promote access to
justice

Be efficient, effective
and high-quality

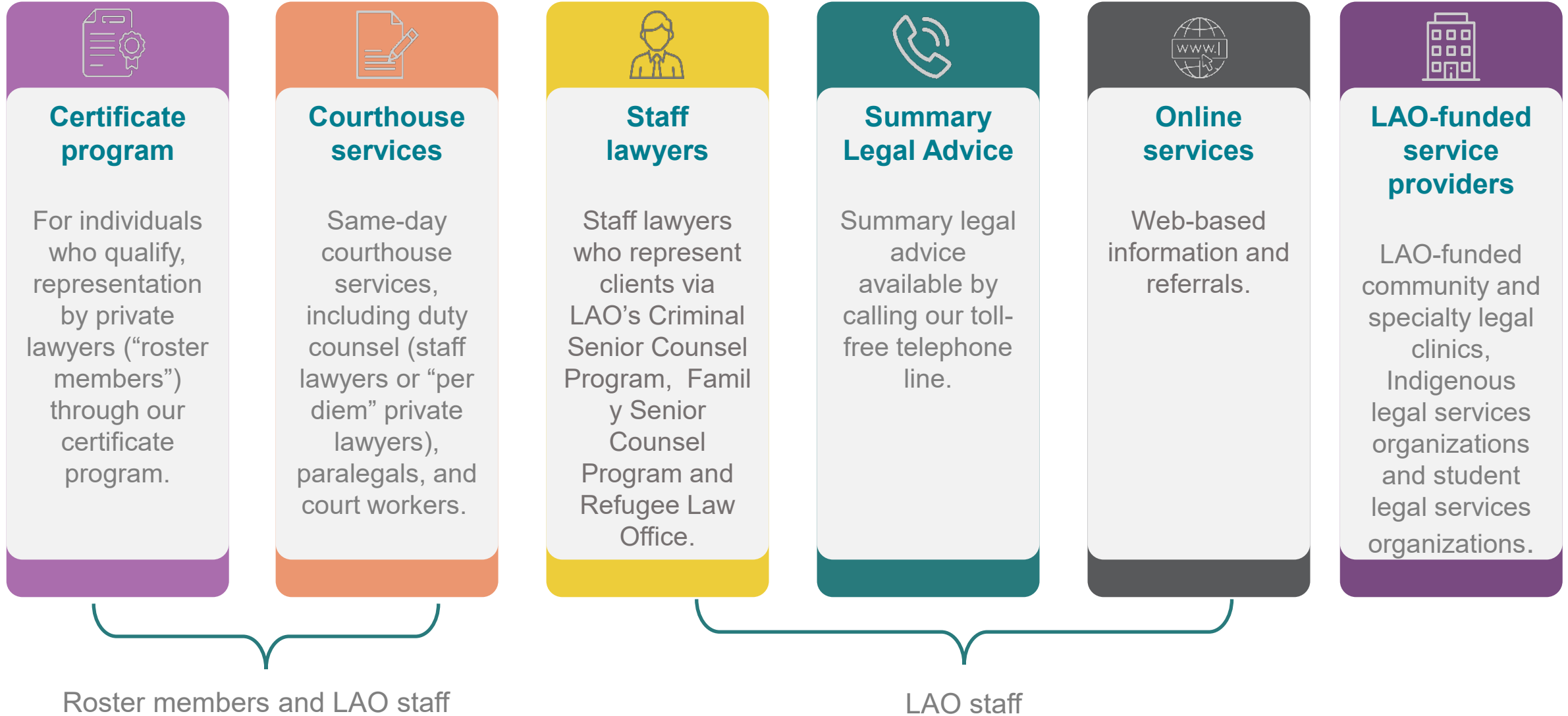
Be provided in a client-
focused, innovative,
transparent and
accountable manner

Be responsive to the
needs of low-income
individuals and
disadvantaged
communities in Ontario

Promote early
resolution, where
appropriate

Be co-ordinated with
other aspects of the
justice system and
with community
services

● ● ● **Service channels and delivery**





Eligibility

LAO's financial and legal eligibility criteria

An individual applying to receive legal aid services must meet both:

LAO's financial eligibility criteria

- Their income and assets must fall within the financial eligibility thresholds set out in LAO's governing rules.

LAO's legal eligibility criteria

- Their legal issue must be one that LAO covers.



LAO's website provides information to help people determine what services they are eligible for:

[Do I qualify for legal aid?](#)

● **Financial eligibility thresholds (FET)**

● LAO recently implemented an increase to its FET for duty counsel services and criminal certificate services. Eligibility requirements are:

Number of family members	Income thresholds for non-criminal certificates	Expanded income thresholds for duty counsel (effective as of March 3, 2025) / criminal certificates (effective as of March 31, 2025)	Expanded asset thresholds for duty counsel (effective as of March 3, 2025) / criminal certificates (effective as of March 31, 2025)
1	\$18,795	\$45,440	\$15,000
2	\$32,131	\$45,440	\$15,000
3	\$39,352	\$45,440	\$15,000
4	\$45,289	\$45,440	\$15,000
5+	\$50,803	\$50,803	\$15,000

● **Considerations for Indigenous clients**

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Self-Identification	Financial eligibility thresholds
• When individuals apply for legal aid or receive duty counsel services LAO will ask if they self identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. • This allows LAO to ensure that their lawyer knows that they are Indigenous and can apply the law properly, including explaining Gladue rights and rights under Indigenous child protection laws.	• LAO excludes monies received from Indigenous settlements from its financial eligibility test. • This includes monies received from class actions, including but not limited to: • Sixties Scoop settlement • Residential school settlement • Day school settlement • Drinking water advisory settlements • Jordan’s principle and treaty settlements



Application process



LAO's application process



Contact Centre

Full service

1-800-668-8258

- Live assistance by phone staff with the help of an interpreter as required
- Monday to Friday, 8 am to 5pm (EST)



Client portal

Self service

www.client.legalaidonline.ca

- Applications via secure online portal



Assisted applications

Assisted service

- With the support of lawyers, LAO court staff or clinic staff for vulnerable groups



Chat

Assisted service

www.legalaid.on.ca

- Via LAO website

First instance decision-making to expedite service in urgent matters and for vulnerable groups is a priority in all access channels.

Follow-up may be required.

Intake services are offered in over 300 languages, including TTY and 18 Indigenous languages and dialects.

Finding a lawyer

The [Find a Lawyer Tool](#) on LAO's public website allows clients to find a legal aid lawyer in their geographical area.



Clients can narrow their search by area of law and language(s) spoken by the lawyer. They can also search for a lawyer by name.



If clients have difficulty finding a lawyer, LAO staff are available in local courts and regional offices to provide in-person assistance in connecting people with services.



LAO also has staff lawyers who provide certificate services via LAO's Criminal Senior Counsel Program, Family Senior Counsel Program and Family Law Services Centres.



Privacy and consent

- LAO operates under the guidelines of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). This means LAO must comply with FIPPA when collecting, using, and disclosing personal information.
- Consent and declaration (C&D) forms are signed by applicants who want to receive LAO's certificate services.
- The purpose of a C&D form is to create an agreement between an applicant and LAO about how they will work together.

By signing the C&D form, applicants are granting LAO permission to:

- Examine their financial information to make sure they are eligible to receive LAO's services.
- Examine information related to their legal proceedings so LAO may better understand and assist with their case.
- Share information with their lawyer.

By signing the C&D form, applicants are also showing that they understand:

- They have certain responsibilities as a recipient of LAO's services (like providing the correct information and following LAO's processes).
- The cost of their court proceedings and the cost of the legal aid services that LAO provides will be handled in a specific way depending on their case.
- They cannot make electronic recordings of their interactions with LAO staff without permission.



Certificate services

Criminal law



Criminal law services

LAO can assist individuals if:

- They have been charged with a crime that could send them to jail if they are found guilty; and
- They qualify financially.

LAO maintains a list of lawyers who are up to date on issues affecting Indigenous clients.

For bail and sentencing, Gladue reports can be accessed via [Aboriginal Legal Services](#)

Family law



Family law services

LAO can assist individuals with:

- Navigating matters in *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA) proceedings and under any Indigenous law created pursuant to Bill C-92: *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth and families*.
- Determining or changing decision-making responsibility, child support, and/or parenting time/contact with their former partner.
 - Resolutions through mediation or negotiated settlements.
 - Preparing court documents and representing them at court.
 - Obtaining a restraining order in cases of domestic violence.

Family law



Pre-litigation services

LAO provides pre-litigation certificates for parents in child protection matters or for proceedings under a First Nation child protection law (Bill C-92).

These certificates include having a lawyer to assist in negotiating a customary care, voluntary care, or temporary care agreement, or to facilitate participation in an Indigenous alternative dispute resolution process.

**Duty counsel and
court-based services**

Criminal duty counsel

Criminal duty counsel

- Assist with bail (consent releases, hearings).
- Assist with resolutions (diversion, pleas).
- Assist with resolution negotiations (CPTs, JPTs).
- Assist clients in Case Management Courts.
- Assist clients in specialty courts (mental health court, Indigenous peoples court, drug treatment court, youth court).
- Legal advice and disclosure review.
- Onsite services at detention centres.
- Public Legal Information and referrals to other agencies.



All services are subject to financial eligibility.

Criminal duty counsel services

Bail services	Day of court triage & advice	Case management courts
• At bail stage, duty counsel can: • Negotiate releases and adjournments. • Conduct bail hearings and judicial referral hearings. • Speak to consent releases. • Assist with bail reviews. • Assist with Myers reviews. • Duty counsel services may vary slightly in different jurisdictions across the province.	• Duty counsel can assist with: • Legal advice. • Disclosure review (on a limited basis). • Referrals to certificate program. • Referrals to community supports and other LAO programs (e.g., Senior Counsel, Summary Legal Advice program). • Financially ineligible individuals can receive legal information.	• In-custody duty counsel and youth: • In-court assistance with routine/administrative appearances (adjournments). • May include agency work for in-custody clients. • Out of custody adults: • In-court assistance with routine/administrative appearances (adjournments).

*Note: Duty counsel services are subject to financial eligibility.
In-custody and youth clients are deemed financially eligible.*

Criminal duty counsel services

Negotiation (outside court)	Resolution advocacy (in court)
• Duty Counsel will negotiate resolutions without a trial, including: • Diversion • Withdrawals • Stays • Peace bonds • Guilty pleas • May include Crown Pre-Trials (CPTs) and resolution-focused Judicial Pre-Trials (JPTs). • May include speciality courts, where applicable.	• Attendance and representation in court for: • Diversion • Withdrawals • Stays • Uncontested peace bonds • Guilty pleas/sentencing • May include speciality courts, where applicable. • May include agency work for certificate clients (e.g., in-custody).

Note: Duty counsel services are subject to financial eligibility. In-custody and youth clients are deemed financially eligible.

Family duty counsel

Family duty counsel

- Assist with CYFSA matters (place of safety and status review).
- Assist with emergency motions (without notice).
- Assist with document preparation (motions to change).
- Assist with case/settlement conferences.
- Provide advice and information through Family Law Information Centres (FLICs).
- Assist with Family Responsibility Office matters (first appearances and adjournments).
- Public Legal Information and referrals to other agencies.

Services are subject to financial eligibility.



Family Law Information Centres

Family Law Information Centres (FLICs) are free services available in courthouses across Ontario that provide information about:

- Separation, divorce and related family law issues
- Child protection
- Family justice services
- Alternative forms of dispute resolution
- Local community resources
- Court processes



FLICs offer resources to assist with family law issues, including:

- Information and referral coordinators
- Duty counsel
- Information about separation, divorce and child protection
- The Ministry of the Attorney General's Guide to Family Procedures
- Court forms and information about court processes
- Referrals to family mediation services connected with the court





Local services

Kenora duty counsel offices



Duty counsel office:
Thursdays, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.



Duty counsel office located at the
Kenora Justice Centre:
Open Mondays & Tuesdays and staffed
while court is operating



Duty counsel phone number:
807-468-6722
Toll free: 1-800-267-0650



Telephone: 807-622-1413
Toll-free: 1-800-465-5581



216 Water Street
Kenora, ON P9N 1S4



101 North Syndicate Avenue
Thunder Bay, ON P7C 3V4

Service options



Talk to a lawyer



Legal representation



Document
preparation



Referrals



General information



Common questions about LAO services

Kenora area office & Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)



Area office & FLIC hours of operation:

Monday - Thursday

9 a.m. – 4 p.m.



Telephone: 807-468-6722

Toll free: 1-800-267-0650



308 2nd Street South, Suite 6

Kenora, ON P9N 1T9

Service options



Apply for legal aid



Criminal law



Family law



General information



Common questions about LAO services

● ● ● **Questions?**

**For additional questions and more
information:**

Email Legal Aid Ontario's External Relations department at
external.relations@lao.on.ca