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April 11, 2019

Dear Ontarians,

Re: CCLA Response to Ontario Legal Aid Budget Cuts – For Immediate Release

Access to justice is one of Canada's most fundamental rights. Without it, the rule of law is diminished, if not rendered meaningless. Today, the Ford Government announced budget cuts that will jeopardize the rights of those who need legal representation the most.

On behalf of the County of Carleton Law Association, I am writing to urge the government of Ontario to adopt a different approach in dealing with Legal Aid funding; an approach that safeguards the rights of our most vulnerable.

The CCLA is the second largest local legal association in Ontario. Along with other services, we advocate on behalf of the professional legal community when faced with challenges to the administration of justice. Today's announced 30% budget cuts to Legal Aid represent a direct threat to access to justice in Ontario.

Legal Aid provides Ontario's poorest (under \$17,000 in annual income) with access to a lawyer when *Charter* rights are at stake. The government of Ontario is responsible for the delivery of Legal Aid services. The CCLA is of the view that these cuts will prevent many from accessing justice to which they are entitled to by right.

We were informed that Legal Aid Ontario will have a reduction to its provincial funding allocation of over 30 percent. This amounts to a reduction of \$133 million from Legal Aid's 2019-2020 budget from \$456 million to \$323 million. This reduction will increase to \$164 million by 2021-2022. In addition, the Ford Government has cut 100% of legal aid funding for refugees, outside of any potential transition costs.

These cuts will impact all areas of service. The consequence of not having adequate legal representation when individual's *Charter* rights are engaged is irreversible. In the criminal context, the right to liberty is jeopardized. In the family context, parents can



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lose custody and access to their children permanently. And, in the refugee context, people risk extradition to torture and persecution basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and political belief.

The economic justification for these cuts is highly questionable. By cutting legal aid in this way, the Ford government is not just denying access to justice to legal aid recipients, it is also denying access to justice to all Ontarians by exacerbating current backlogs in our Court system. The impact on the administration of justice will be felt across the province.

Burying these huge changes in a budget means that there will be no opportunity to consider the harmful impacts and the unintended consequences. The CCLA asks the government to take a more responsible approach, one that provides for a sustainable future. Ontario should not risk having our most marginalized denied access to justice. It doesn't respect the *Charter* and, more practically, it will create significant backlogs due to self-representation in an already hemorrhaging justice system.

The CCLA has previously expressed concern that access to justice is the greatest challenge faced by our justice system. The denial of legal aid on short notice and without consultation is completely irresponsible. It will unnecessarily throw the legal system into chaos. We call on the Ontario Government to reverse this unilateral decision to ensure that the rights of our most vulnerable remain protected.

Yours very truly,

C. Katie Black

Trustee of the County of Carleton Law Association

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