



## Discrimination and Harassment Counsel

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**A**s a prosecutor dealing with domestic and sexual violence cases for 26 years, I know how hard it can be to tell anyone that you are being, or have been, victimized. It can also be very difficult to disclose that you are being harassed or discriminated against by a lawyer, paralegal or student member of the Law Society of Ontario (LSO). You may be concerned that telling someone may have negative implications for you personally or professionally. You may feel powerless. You may wonder what you should do.

For over 20 years, the LSO has provided the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel (DHC) service free of charge to the Ontario public including lawyers, paralegals and students. The DHC provides a confidential and safe space for individuals with complaints of discrimination or harassment by an Ontario lawyer, paralegal or student member of the LSO, based on the grounds prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code which are also prohibited by the LSO's Rules of Professional Conduct and the Paralegal Rules of Conduct.

Individuals who reach out to the DHC can confidentially discuss their concerns with a knowledgeable and empathetic listener with cultural competence skills. The DHC service supports the LSO's statutory mandate to ensure that licensees meet standards of professional conduct.

The DHC provides statistical data to the LSO so that it can better understand and address systemic discrimination and harassment.

### What types of complaints does the DHC address?

The DHC deals with many complaints of discrimination and harassment by LSO licensees and students in different scenarios including individuals reporting on:

- Their own lawyer or paralegal
- Opposing lawyers or paralegals
- LSO licensees or students in the workplace, training or educational programs, and
- LSO licensees or students in other professional contexts.

### What can you expect if you contact the DHC?

The DHC will listen and provide information to assist in identifying and evaluating your options. You may also be referred to other agencies or directed to resources.

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**The Law Society regulates lawyers and paralegals in Ontario in the public interest. The Law Society has a mandate to protect the public interest, to maintain and to advance the cause of justice and the rule of law, to facilitate access to justice for the people of Ontario and to act in a timely, open and efficient manner.**



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### What options are available if you call the DHC?

You can expect to be informed about the different options available which may include:

- Only reporting your experience to the DHC, (for some, speaking confidentially with an objective, knowledgeable outsider is all they want)
- Tips and coaching if you want to handle a situation yourself
- Speaking to your union representative
- Filing an internal complaint within your workplace
- Making a complaint to the respondent licensee's employer
- Contacting the Human Rights Legal Support Centre
- Filing an application with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario or the Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Filing a complaint with the Law Society's Articling Program
- Filing a complaint of professional misconduct with the Law Society
- Contacting the police
- Seeking legal advice about a civil cause of action
- Mediation or conciliation by the DHC, or the DHC engaging in education or coaching with the respondent licensee to assist with compliance of professional obligations and best practices

### What other information can you expect to receive from the DHC?

You can expect to receive information to help you assess which option best suits your circumstances including:

- Anticipated costs in pursuing an option
- Whether you should be represented by a lawyer or paralegal
- Information on how to obtain legal representation including the Law Society's Lawyer Referral Service
- How to file a complaint or initiate an application
- The processes involved in pursuing available options
- General types of remedies why may be available
- The general time limits for each option

### Does calling the DHC mean that you have to follow through on these options?

The choice is yours about what you do with the information you receive from the DHC. There is no obligation to take any action.

### Can the DHC help lawyers, paralegals and students understand their professional obligations?

The DHC engages in educational events to ensure compliance with Law Society codes of conduct and human rights laws. If you are interested in having the DHC present to your legal organization or firm, please contact them directly.

### How to contact the DHC

Visit [dhcounsel.on.ca](http://dhcounsel.on.ca) or call 1-877-790-2200 to access this free service. Although the DHC is funded by the LSO, the DHC works independently from the Law Society in a separate office and all information is kept in strict confidence.

Please reach out to the DHC. You are not alone.

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