



November 9, 2018

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

Delivered by Fax: (416) 326-4007

Dear Minister,

Re: Closure of Pro Bono Ontario's Court-Based Services for Unrepresented Litigants

The Toronto Lawyers Association is writing to express its dismay regarding the closure of Pro Bono Ontario's court-based services for unrepresented litigants in December 2018 due to a lack of funding. As you know, these services include three high performing help centres and several connected services that match the needs of low-income unrepresented litigants with the generosity and expertise of the legal profession. They are the only services of their kind in Ontario, and indeed all of Canada.

This represents a giant step backwards in terms of access to justice and the efficient administration of justice. Given the fact that the bulk of the economic benefits (\$5 million annually, including \$2 million in legal services donated by the profession) of these programs accrue directly to the government, we look to you for leadership on this issue: your government can and should prevent this.

The TLA fully supports PBO's efforts to enhance access to justice in Ontario. PBO is the only organization in Ontario dedicated to the unmet legal needs of people with civil, non-family legal problems. Without PBO's programs, there is nothing to bridge the gap between these vulnerable people and the lawyers who seek to donate their services. Simply put, PBO brings the public and the profession together. It does so in an effective, low cost and risk-managed fashion that eliminates barriers to pro bono participation and protects the public interest. The loss of these programs will inevitably mean that pro bono work – especially for solo and small firm lawyers and for younger lawyers who need support when engaging in advocacy activities – will be reduced to what it was before these programs existed.

PBO's court-based services have helped 145,000 low-income clients navigate a justice system that was not designed for self-help. These include people who came to PBO when they lost their jobs, or their housing, or their savings. Many of them have disabilities and are elderly. All of them struggle to make ends meet. None of them can address their legal problems without help. Only PBO has stepped up to help them. Without PBO, what will they do?

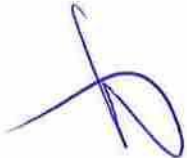
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When we help these people, we also help the rest of Ontario. An independent program evaluation demonstrates that PBO's court-based programs save the government \$5 million each year. PBO has shown that its programs create a \$10 to \$1 return on investment. If we lose these programs everyone will pay downstream.

While the profession can assist, we need the government to take the lead to provide the stable funding required to continue these programs. We therefore urge the government to work with the legal community to ensure that these programs are not lost.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Derstine', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dirk M. Derstine
President
Toronto Lawyers Association