



American College of Trial Lawyers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS RESPONDS TO DECISION TO CLOSE
PRO BONO ONTARIO'S COURT-BASED SERVICES FOR UNREPRESENTED LITIGANTS
BY THE END OF 2018**

Closure is Regressive Step in Access to Justice for People of Ontario

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (November, 8, 2018) – The mission of improving the administration of justice requires the American College of Trial Lawyers to speak to the current decision of the Board of Directors of Pro Bono Ontario to close its court-based services for unrepresented litigants by the end of the year due to inadequate funding.

In a letter to the Attorney General of Ontario Caroline Mulroney, College President **Jeffrey S. Leon, LSM** of Bennett Jones LLP said, “We understand that Pro Bono Ontario’s Board of Directors has decided that it has no choice but to close its court-based services for unrepresented litigants by the end of 2018. We further understand that this decision is based on a lack of funding and that your Government has declined to provide the requisite sustaining funding so that these services can continue to be provided for those in need of legal assistance and representation in Ontario.”

“The College expresses our concern about this development and we urge your Government to do what is needed to prevent this closure,” President Leon said in his letter.

Particularly at this point in time in Ontario, it is unfortunate that the services being provided in such a thriving manner will be discontinued. 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 is a regressive step in terms of access to justice for the people of Ontario and the administration of justice. That is why we urge your Government to prevent this from happening,” President Leon said.

Pro Bono Ontario was the first organization outside the United States to receive the Emil Gumpert Award, which included a USD\$50,000 grant from the American College of Trial Lawyers Foundation. This grant allowed the launch of the Help Centre in Ottawa’s Elgin Street Courthouse in 2010. The Emil Gumpert Award is awarded on an annual basis to a public or private program whose principal purpose is to maintain and improve the administration of justice. This Centre has been a success story and has become a valuable resource for all involved, including the legal profession, the judiciary, court services and in particular, the public.

“The Help Centre has done all that we hoped it would and has provided a model that can be replicated throughout Canada and the United States to provide legal services to those in need. It would be

unfortunate if this investment does not continue to be promoted and protected through ongoing government financing,” President Leon said.

The rule of law forms the foundation of a fair and just society. Access to justice for all citizens is a fundamental principle of the rule of law. If members of society are shut out of the legal system because of their inability to afford a lawyer, they are denied a meaningful opportunity to exercise their rights and thus society has failed them. Through its Access to Justice and Legal Services Committee and in many other ways, the American College of Trial Lawyers strongly supports and encourages its Fellows and all those numerous dedicated organizations and individuals who work on a daily basis through their pro bono service and otherwise to ensure access to justice for all individuals and families.

Ontario has over 50,000 talented lawyers, some of whom are Fellows of the College. They all understand that pro bono work is fundamental to their professional obligations. However, support is required in order to provide a basis for those obligations to be fulfilled. Prior to PBO’s court-based programs, pro bono work in Ontario was done on an ad hoc and sporadic basis. That all changed with the advent of Pro Bono Ontario’s court-based services. Ontario became a leader in Canada in facilitating the ability of lawyers who desire to provide citizens with access to justice to do so. This became a tremendous asset for the legal profession in general and for trial lawyers in particular.

“The College believes that Ontario can and should continue to remain at the forefront of creating access to justice. Low-income unrepresented litigants should continue to receive the advice and representation they need to have meaningful participation in the justice system, whether on a represented basis or on a self-represented basis. Without this, these people will be left on their own to fend for themselves. We encourage the Government of Ontario to reconsider its decision,” President Leon said.

About the [American College of Trial Lawyers](#)

The American College of Trial Lawyers is composed of the best of the trial bar from the United States, and Canada and is recognized as the leading trial organization in both countries. Founded in 1950, the College is an invitation only fellowship. The College thoroughly investigates each nominee for admission and selects only those who have demonstrated the very highest standards of trial advocacy, ethical conduct, integrity, professionalism and collegiality. The College maintains and seeks to improve the standards of trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice through education and public statements on important legal issues relating to its mission. The College strongly supports the independence of the judiciary, trial by jury, respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and fair and just representation of all parties to legal proceedings.

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