



American College of Trial Lawyers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS RESPONDS TO DECISION BY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT TO SLASH FUNDING TO LEGAL AID ONTARIO *Calls on Government to Reassess Drastic Budget Cuts*

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (May 1, 2019) – The mission of improving the administration of justice requires the American College of Trial Lawyers to speak to the current decision by the Ontario government to cut funding to Legal Aid Ontario.

This month, the Ontario government announced a 30 per cent reduction to funding for Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). These cuts will significantly impede the rights to fair representation and access to the courts for the most vulnerable Ontarians. ACTL President **Jeffrey S. Leon, LSM** of Bennett Jones LLP (Toronto) said, “These cuts effect people, some of whom are among our most vulnerable, who desperately require funding to obtain reasonable legal assistance. I would urge the Ontario government to reconsider these proposals and to reaffirm its support for giving all individuals in the Province meaningful access to justice at the most critical points in their lives.”

LAO funds services in the areas of family, criminal, and immigration and refugee law. Services are provided through a mixed-delivery model that includes legal clinics serving every community in Ontario. To qualify for most legal aid services, a single person without dependents must be earning less than \$18,000.

The government also proposes to cut \$10.5 million from the family justice system, an area that is already notoriously and critically under-funded, despite sustained calls from stakeholders for more resources. There is a drastic need for more legal aid funding for vulnerable families and children who need to interact with the justice system, not less.

Most drastically, the government has decided to defund *all* immigration and refugee law services, creating an immediate and devastating funding crisis. Often the victims of complex trauma and unable to speak the language of the courts, refugee claimants are rarely able to effectively self-represent.

The American College of Trial Lawyers joins the Law Society of Ontario, the Ontario Bar Association, the Family Law Association, the Criminal Lawyers’ Association, the Ontario Association of Child Protection Lawyers, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, the Society of United Professionals, and a growing number of justice advocates in calling upon the Ontario government to reassess these drastic budget cuts, to reverse the immediate cuts to immigration and refugee certificates, and to work with private and clinic lawyers to ensure that essential legal aid services for vulnerable Ontarians are preserved.

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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