



# Bhutila Karpoche

MPP / Députée / གྲོས་ཚོགས་འཕུལ་མི། • Parkdale—High Park

Charles Harnick  
Board Chair  
Legal Aid Ontario  
40 Dundas Street West  
Suite 200  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2H1

Tuesday, May 7, 2019

## **RE: Urgent action needed for Legal Aid Ontario to approve long-term lease agreement for Parkdale Community Legal Services**

Dear Mr. Harnick and Board of Directors:

I am writing to urge Legal Aid Ontario to immediately approve the long-term lease for Parkdale Community Legal Services' (PCLS) new location in the community, and in doing so, affirm your commitment to promoting access to justice for low-income individuals in Ontario.

As you know, PCLS' lease ends on July 31, 2019, and they must vacate their current location at Queen West and Dufferin. PCLS strove determinedly to secure a new long-term home in South Parkdale, where the majority of their clients live, while gentrification and rising rents have squeezed several other social service agencies out of the neighbourhood.

Legal Aid Ontario approved the lease—in principle. Now, however, the Ford Conservatives have cut legal aid funding by 30 per cent—meaning Parkdale and Swansea residents risk the immediate loss of their much-needed local legal clinic. What's more, should the clinic remain in the community, Legal Aid Ontario's proposal to make a 16 per cent cut in the clinic system would lead to the loss of staff and a reduction in services.

While I understand Legal Aid Ontario is willing to fund a one-year lease for PCLS, any changes to current programs and services will severely limit access to justice, equity and equality for Parkdale and Swansea's most vulnerable. These neighbourhoods have historically been low-income and diverse, with community members facing many challenges due to poverty, immigration status, and disability. Additionally, as a teaching clinic, PCLS has trained thousands of social justice lawyers. The loss of its space, whether now or in a year's time, would put this model at risk. As such, I urge you to consider this lease as a continuation, and approve a long-term lease agreement immediately.

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**Queen's Park Office**

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As the Member of Provincial Parliament for Parkdale-High Park, I hear daily from residents who are seeking help with employment, housing, immigration and social assistance. If PCLS leaves the community, these vulnerable residents will have nowhere left to turn.

As Members of the Board of Directors of Legal Aid Ontario, you have made a commitment to uphold the core principle, and constitutional right, of access to justice.

I appreciate that the Ford government's callous cuts to legal aid funding has put Legal Aid Ontario in a difficult position, but you also have a responsibility to your clients and to underprivileged Ontarians seeking justice against abusive spouses, and unscrupulous employers and landlords.

A growing number of professionals and Ontarians are vehemently opposing these cuts. I urge you to join them, and commit to keeping legal clinics in their communities and re-commit to funding adequate, long-term space in Parkdale for PCLS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bhutila Karpoche".

Bhutila Karpoche, MPP  
Parkdale – High Park

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