



PARC

re:Building Lives

james Partanen, Co-Chair
Peter Hoag, Co-Chair
Board of Directors
Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre
Wednesday May 8th, 2019

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

RE: Urgent approval needed from Legal Aid Ontario for long-term lease agreement for PCLS.

Dear Mr. Harnick and LAO Board:

We have been instructed by the Board of Directors of Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC) to write to urge Legal Aid Ontario to approve the long-term lease for the new location of Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS). PCLS remaining in our community is critical to PARC's obligations under our MOHLTC/TC-LHIN MSA Agreement to provide social support to Parkdale's most vulnerable low-income residents. We feel we must provide two clear points for your consideration.

Firstly, one of the core services we provide is assistance with persons struggling with comorbid mental health, addiction, and physiological health issues; so called complex care patients. Such healthcare service users necessarily require specialist appointments, many of which are downtown. The incredible difficulty that low-income persons struggling with mental health and addiction issues (also a core service population for PCLS) have in navigating the mental and financial complexities of transportation outside of their familiar neighbourhood, even to receive crucial medical care, is a **constant** aspect of our daily service provision. We know that one of the key reasons some of our service users are failing to receive the healthcare they need is solely because those services are not being provided in Parkdale. It is inappropriate to assume that persons struggling with mental health, addiction, and chronic poverty issues have the capacity to travel outside of their neighbourhoods to receive even critically important services. Decisions that incorporate such an assumption are at dire risk of creating institutional access barriers to social supports.

Secondly, we are also acutely aware of the extremely high level of legal and justice involvement on the part of our service users. The intense stress of legal issues (particularly legal issues relating to housing) and justice involvement is difficult for

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The Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre: "A community where people rebuild their lives."

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anyone to handle on their own, and well beyond the coping ability of many people living with mental health and addiction issues. It is our job to constantly attempt to shore up and support our service users' mental health, however we constantly see many residents' mental health suffer and decline in response to unresolved legal, housing, and justice issues. We also repeatedly witness the all-to-common result: further exacerbated justice involvement and complete loss of housing. It is unambiguously clear to us that anything that makes it more difficult for our service users to access legal services will stress people least able to cope and result in yet more acute justice involvement. For many residents mental health and addiction recovery goes hand-in-hand with secure housing and justice recovery. Putting barriers in the way of either impedes both. Please consider this when making this important decision.

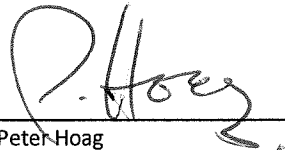
It must also be mentioned that PCLS has been a leader in building a healthy mutually supportive network of community organisations here in Parkdale. We at PARC know this, because it has been a core mission of ours to do the same for many years, and it has been our pleasure to work with PCLS towards that common goal. PCLS's work significantly contributes to making our community a resilient and diverse part of Toronto where low-income residents can access the social services they need. Parkdale, as a community, needs PCLS to stay in Parkdale.

We understand that difficult decisions are facing Legal Aid Ontario in the current political and financial context. However LAO's very existence mandates your commitment to access to justice for low-income Ontarians and their communities. Upholding this commitment requires keeping legal services like PCLS in the neighbourhoods they serve. Please act accordingly.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre,



James Partanen
Caucus Co-Chair
Board of Directors
Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre



Peter Hoag
Community Co-Chair
Board of Directors
Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre

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