

David Field
President
Legal Aid Ontario
Suite 200 – 40 Dundas Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2H1

May 9, 2019

Dear Mr. Field:

Re: LAO's Commitment to Parkdale Community Legal Services

On behalf of over one thousand students at Osgoode Hall Law School, we are writing to you about the recently-announced cuts to the community legal aid clinic system in Ontario, and in particular, the decision of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) to target Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) for a significant reduction in funding. As Osgoode students, including those who chose to come to Osgoode Hall as a result of the Poverty Law Intensive Program at PCLS, we are deeply concerned about the impact of these cuts on the future of PCLS and clinical education more broadly.

The clinical lawyering program at PCLS was the first of its kind in North America. In the near half-century since its inception, the clinic has become a cornerstone in the community in Parkdale. PCLS is a driver of clinical legal education and law reform. By providing direct client service and legal representation as well as public legal information, it acts as a nexus of support to community members challenging violence, precarity, and instability in their lives and in their community. It is essential that PCLS have stable, long-term space in Parkdale in order to maintain its role in the community, as a leading clinic in Canada and lynchpin of Osgoode's clinical education program, as well as for LAO to maintain its commitment to access to justice.

As per the *Legal Services Act, 1998*, LAO's mandate is to "promote access to justice throughout Ontario for low-income individuals". This access to justice is fulfilled through the provision of high-quality legal services that are catered to the communities served, recognizing the diverse needs of low-income communities across the province. PCLS' community lawyering model is exemplary of LAO's vision of delivering innovative and responsive legal aid services. Through the largest student program in the province, the clinic facilitates an invaluable experiential learning opportunity. PCLS now has a strong network of over 1,700 Osgoode alumni who model the values of equity and access, and deliver quality legal services to marginalized communities in Parkdale and beyond.

On April 30, 2019, the LAO Board of Directors reneged on its earlier commitment to fund a new longterm lease for PCLS. We further understand that LAO is considering a proposal that will force PCLS to move out of the Parkdale community indefinitely, and into a much smaller space. For many of the clinic's clients who already face barriers to accessing justice, such a move will make it nearly impossible to access legal services. They will also lose the skilled community workers who advocate alongside them to fight disempowerment, poverty, and displacement. Osgoode students, many of whom are drawn to the law school because of the Poverty Law Intensive Program, will lose an important experiential learning opportunity. We unequivocally condemn this proposal that will undermine access to justice for members of the Parkdale

community, and force the clinic to downsize the number of staff and students, further undermining access to legal services.

On behalf of our members, we call on you to commit to longterm and stable funding for PCLS, to ensure that PCLS can remain in the Parkdale Community and continue to deliver its full range of services, including community legal work and the student program.

Signed,

Adam Veenendaal
Chair

per Student Caucus
Osgoode Hall Law School
scchair@osgoode.yorku.ca

CC: Caroline Mulroney, Attorney General, Government of Ontario
Doug Ford, Premier, Government of Ontario
Johanna MacDonald, Executive Director, Parkdale Community Legal Services
Adrian Smith, Academic Director, Parkdale Community Legal Services
Mary Condon, Dean, Osgoode Hall Law School
Manuela Morales, President, Legal and Literary Society