

Dear colleagues,

As part of our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is working to offer more business support and information to lawyers.

We are committed to instituting interim business solutions, and are eager to work with you while cooperating with the courts and Ministry of the Attorney General to maintain access to justice.

Following this note, we've listed resources regarding safe practices, as well as more key updates relevant to the legal community.

Further to our message on March 17 regarding service, billing and other steps LAO is taking, we are working hard to develop a suite of business supports to help you during this time.

These include:

- Extending the date for completing your self-report.
- As of March 27, reducing payment time from 28 to 14 days for submitted accounts.
- There is \$17.8M in outstanding billings from the private bar in LAO's accounts payable. LAO will pay this amount out on Friday.
- Reinstating the bail block authorization to be added to certificates.
- Exploring ways for alternative payments.
- Waiving merit testing for bail review.
- Paying volunteer criminal lawyers who attended court March 16-20, 2020
- Working on a temporary payment option for block fees which will allow counsel the choice of billing on an hourly basis so lawyers can bill for prep work prior to the conclusion of a matter and bill for resolutions where they were not in attendance.
- Temporarily suspending collection on recoveries identified in audits and investigations.

We are also engaged in ongoing discussions with law associations in an effort to further clarify billing and certificate coverage rules.

For the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, some of LAO's policies regarding legal and financial eligibility (excluding appellant matters) will be temporarily changed to allow us to quickly help people at heightened risk. In the coming days, **legal and financial eligibility testing will be waived for the following:**

- Criminal defence certificates for in-custody accused (excluding homicide)
- Summary legal advice
- Child, Youth, and Family Services Act (CYFSA) matters
- Psychiatric patients seeking assistance for CCB and ORB matters

- Victims of domestic abuse who are seeking family court assistance including initial and motion to change proceedings

Implementation details are still being worked out.

I have included some additional resources below relating to COVID-19.

With thanks and gratitude for your ongoing work and cooperation,

David Field
President and CEO
Legal Aid Ontario

Latest updates and notices from the courts about closures and changes in procedures:

- [News release from the Government of Ontario](#): Stop the Spread Business Information Line Now Open at 1-888-444-3659.
 - The Province has launched a toll-free line to provide support to Ontario businesses who have questions about the province's recent emergency order to close at-risk workplaces following recommendations by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.
- [Notice from Superior Court](#)
- [Notice from Court of Appeal](#)
- [Notice from Small Claims Court](#)
- [Notice from Federal Court](#)
- [Notice from Supreme Court of Canada](#)
- [Notice from Ontario Courts of Justice](#)

[Please note that on March 17, 2020, the Ontario Government passed a regulation pursuant to section 7.1 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act suspending all limitation periods and procedural timelines \(except for CYFSA matters\)](#), retroactive to March 16, 2020. Please [visit e-Laws](#) for the full details of the regulation, once it is available.

Resources for promoting health and safety: COVID-19

Ontario's Ministry of Health recommends the following everyday steps:

- wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer

- sneeze and cough into your sleeve
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- avoid contact with people who are sick
- stay home if you are sick

The Government of Canada has published resources and recommendations, including [guidance on cleaning and disinfecting public spaces](#) and [tips for practicing social distancing](#).

Please note that the Government of Canada reports there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes for people who are aged 65 and over, with compromised immune systems or with underlying medical conditions. Extra care should be taken if you identify with one of these categories or when interacting with others who may.

Ontario's Ministry of Health is [currently advising](#) anyone who has travelled outside of Canada to self-isolate for 14 days when they return, and to monitor their symptoms.

The [City of Toronto](#) and the [Government of Canada](#) have made similar directions.

Please visit the following websites for more information on COVID-19, including updates and additional resources:

- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)