
MEETING WITH YOUR MPP TO END LEGAL AID CRISIS

The Refugee Lawyers Association (RLA) and the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) are encouraging concerned individuals to reach out to their MPPs directly to engage them in action against legal aid cuts.

This information sheet provides a step-by-step guide to setting up a meeting, and goals for the meeting itself.

Setting up a Meeting with your MPP

1. Call the Constituency Office of your MPP. You can use this website to confirm your electoral district:

http://fyed.elections.on.ca/fyed/en/form_page_en.jsp

Then you can go to this website to click on the name of your MPP and get all the contact information for their constituency office:

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_current.do?locale=en&ord=Riding&dir=ASC&list_type=all_mpps

2. Introduce yourself. Mention that you are a constituent of theirs, and that you are concerned about cuts to legal aid for immigrants and refugees.

Tell them that you would like to meet with your MPP at the constituency office to discuss your concerns.

3. Timing:
 - a. Let them know these cuts have already taken effect, and that you'd like to meet as soon as possible.
 - b. You will need about 30 minutes for the meeting.
 - c. You should expect the meeting to be scheduled within a week. This is a crisis situation.
4. If you are asked for specifics about why you want to meet, you could say that the legal aid cuts by the province were abrupt and unilateral. While the Province has taken the position that the Federal Government should pay the full costs, the complete withdrawal of funding is having immediate and severe consequences. Tell them we are facing a human rights crisis. And let

them know people's lives are being impacted right now. Mention the affected individuals and families, including those:

- a. Facing possible removal from Canada;
- b. Currently in immigration detention;
- c. Who have received negative decision and are now facing refugee appeals and court processes.

5. Write down the name of the person you are talking to at the constituency office. Be polite and friendly.

Goals for Meeting with Your MPP

1. Briefly educate your MPP about Legal Aid services for refugees and immigrants:

Some helpful background:

- Legal Aid provides Ontario's poorest (under \$17,000 in annual income) with access to a lawyer when their fundamental rights and freedoms are at stake.
- Until Tuesday, April 16, 2019, when the service was abruptly discontinued, Legal Aid services have been available for:
 - Refugee claimants to prepare for hearings and appeals;
 - Humanitarian applications;
 - Immigration detention hearings;
 - Permanent Residents facing removal from Canada
- Refugee and immigration services are a small portion of the overall LAO budget;

2. Explain why people need a lawyer in immigration and refugee proceedings:

Provide an overview of the need for lawyers to:

- **Navigate a complex legal system:** The refugee determination process is rigorous. Claimants need to prepare a detailed narrative and present evidence to support a claim e.g. medical reports, police reports, affidavits, human rights reports. They undergo hours of questioning about the claim;
- **Provide support to vulnerable people in transition:** People arriving are traumatized from persecution, some are still physically unwell from torture, many do not speak English and are unfamiliar with our legal system;
- **Defend** them if they are ordered removed from Canada. This includes long-term permanent residents, some of whom have been in Canada since childhood, who simply have not applied for citizenship;
- **File appeals** of sponsorship applications, for individuals who are seeking to sponsor family members and to the RAD.

3. Brief your MPP on the effects of the cuts:

- Cuts were made abruptly, and have caused significant representation gaps for people facing refugee hearings, the possibility of removal from Canada, and immigration detention;

- People who are eligible for legal aid can't afford a lawyer; we expect that many if not most people will end up unrepresented in these high stakes proceedings;
 - There are likely members of their constituency (individuals, families, and children) that are experiencing the effects of these cuts;
 - This is a human rights crisis, the impact on the lives of Ontario's most vulnerable is very real, and the effects will be irreversible;
 - The cuts will cause significant delays in the immigration system and in the courts;
4. Find out if the MPP has any questions or areas of concern:
- Be sure to ask if the MPP has any questions you can answer;
 - Ask them who else you should be talking to on this issue.
5. Secure a commitment - if possible - that the MPP is willing to provide their support by:
- raising the issue in caucus;
 - asking a question in the Legislature; and/or,
 - talking directly to the Attorney General.
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