



News Release

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FEWER LOW-INCOME PEOPLE QUALIFY FOR LEGAL AID: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) For the last 10 years, Ontario has spent more on legal aid per capita than any other province. Despite this, fewer people are qualifying for the Legal Aid Ontario certificates needed to obtain the services of a lawyer. Instead, more people have had to rely on courthouse duty counsel, legal advice from Legal Aid Ontario, and information from its website, Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2011 Annual Report*.

“The financial eligibility cutoff for legal aid certificates in Ontario has not changed since the 1990s,” McCarter said today on release of the Report. “This, combined with the increasing cost of lawyers’ legal aid billings, has meant that not all people with low-income levels can be provided with dedicated legal representation.”

Legal Aid Ontario is an independent corporation accountable to the Attorney General. It has a mandate to provide low-income Ontarians with high-quality legal aid services in a cost-effective and efficient manner, with the private bar and clinics as the foundation for legal services.

Following are some of the Auditor General’s more significant findings:

- Stronger controls are needed to ensure that all payments to lawyers, which total almost \$190 million a year, are justified. At the time of the audit, Legal Aid Ontario was addressing deficiencies in the system it uses to pay lawyers.
- We found that Legal Aid Ontario’s long-term strategy to make its operations more cost-effective and improve access to legal aid was heading in the right direction.
- Legal Aid Ontario does not have a quality-assurance program in place with the Law Society of Upper Canada to help ensure legal services provided by staff and contract lawyers are of a high standard.
- Legal Aid Ontario efforts to get community legal clinics to operate more efficiently have resulted in a strained relationship with the clinics.

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For more information, please contact:

Jim McCarter
Auditor General
(416) 327-1326

Christine Pedias
Communications
(416) 327-2336