



The Advocates' Society La Société des plaideurs

December 3, 2018

The Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP
Attorney General of Ontario
Ministry of the Attorney General
11th Floor, 720 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Dear Madam Attorney:

RE: Pro Bono Ontario Law Help Centres

As you know, The Advocates' Society, established in 1963, is a not-for-profit association of more than 6,000 members throughout Canada. Its mandate includes, among other things, making submissions to governments and other entities on matters affecting access to justice, the administration of justice and the practice of law by advocates.

Last month, I wrote to you to urge the Government of Ontario to provide a funding infusion to keep Pro Bono Ontario's Law Help Centres operational and ensure that over 18,000 low-income Ontarians could continue to benefit from the Centres' important services. The Law Help Centres essentially provide the infrastructure for lawyers to volunteer their time in an effort to assist those in need of help and, in doing so, to help stem the tide of unrepresented and self-represented litigants in courts across the province. As I emphasized in my letter, providing financial support to the Law Help Centres in their mission of assisting unrepresented litigants aligns with your Government's commitment to ensuring access to justice for Ontarians and enhancing the efficiency of the justice system.

Last week, Pro Bono Ontario announced that the Law Help Centres would stay open until at least the end of 2019, thanks to a one-time contribution of \$250,000 from the Federal Government and \$275,000 in generous donations from law firms, individual lawyers and law associations.

While that news was heartening, we were disappointed that your Government did not step up to provide financial assistance to keep Pro Bono Ontario's Law Help Centres operational. An investment of that kind would have been perfectly compatible with your Government's constitutional obligation with respect to the administration of justice in the Province. Based on the 2017 study by The Resource for Great Programs, the Ontario justice system will enjoy an estimated \$5 million in savings from the operation of the Law Help Centres in 2019. The savings resulting from investments by the Federal Government and members of the private bar will accrue to provincial taxpayers.

We at The Advocates' Society feel strongly that it would be responsible and prudent for the Government of Ontario to commit to funding Pro Bono Ontario so that thousands of Ontarians who find themselves incapable of retaining lawyers will continue to be assisted in resolving their disputes. While the recent funding injection provides a short-term solution to the funding gap at Pro Bono Ontario, the long-term stability of the Law Help Centre program remains at stake. I urge you again to consider taking a long-term

role in the sustainable continuation of the Law Help Centre program. This would not only be appropriately aligned with your Government's justice agenda and obligations but would also represent a wise leveraging of taxpayer dollars into savings that would benefit all Ontarians while improving the justice system.

Yours truly,



Brian Gover
President

C: Vicki White, Chief Executive Officer
Dave Mollica, Director of Policy and Practice