



Office for Systemic Justice
Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada
London, ON, N6A 4X3

April 22, 2019

Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

We urge the Ontario government to re-think its budget cuts to legal aid funding.

In the April 11, 2019 budget, you announced a 30% reduction in Legal Aid Ontario's (LAO) budget and indicated the government will no longer fund refugee and immigration law services "outside of any potential transition costs."

Access to legal aid is already far too limited in Ontario. The immediate cuts of 30% to LAO's budget will create further marginalization from legal justice. This can only erode faith in the fairness of the legal system.

In addition, assisting refugees and newcomers with legal services is integral to creating a fair society. Moreover, it costs us little. In 2017-2018, refugee and immigration services were just a small piece (\$45 million) of LAO's \$460 million budget. Yet, in that same year, this money allowed LAO to address 13,687 immigration and refugee legal matters. Without such legal assistance, these legal matters would be very hard to navigate and leave newcomers vulnerable to irreversible decisions with hugely negative impacts.

One of the ways we define our character as a province is by how we treat each other when we're in vulnerable circumstances. The Ontario government's new slogan suggests we want an Ontario in which all people have a fair chance to grow. This can only happen if we ensure each of us has access to the resources and opportunities which are fundamental to participation in our society. Fair access to the legal system is one of the basic resources everyone needs.

Sincerely,

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