

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM7.14	ACTION			Ward: All
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Supporting Low-Income Residents' Right to Legal Aid - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Gord Perks

**** Notice of this Motion has not been given. A two-thirds vote is required to waive notice.
* This Motion is subject to referral to the Economic and Community Development Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.
* This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.***

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Gord Perks, recommends that:

1. City Council express its strong support for a robust, provincially-funded legal aid program to assist vulnerable Ontarians.
2. City Council express its strong opposition to the proposed funding cuts to Legal Aid Ontario by the provincial government.
3. City Council call on the Province of Ontario to reverse the proposed funding cuts to Legal Aid Ontario.

Summary

Thousands of low and moderate income Torontonians rely on legal aid services every day. A lost job due to injury or unfairness, eviction, family breakdown, arrest or health deterioration can derail lives. For those who don't have the means to pay, legal aid is a crucial service to stop the derailment and help people and families get back on track. Lawyers, community legal workers and others who assist legally-aided clients stand with ordinary Ontarians every day, helping them to navigate complex bureaucracies and intimidating adjudicative processes. Legal aid workers help keep roofs over heads and food on tables for residents of Toronto and beyond.

The Ontario government recently announced a 30 percent cut to Legal Aid Ontario with a further 10 percent cut slated for next year. These cuts are deep and unprecedented. If implemented, these cuts will mean job losses to front-line service providers. This will have a direct impact on municipalities.

We know that the paperwork and procedural hurdles low income people regularly face will not go away because legal aid services have been cut; they will simply divert to other overburdened service providers. A 2013 Canadian Bar Association report concluded that for every dollar

spent on legal aid, the government saves an average of \$6 in other areas of government expenditure, such as homelessness, health, family breakdown and incarceration.

The cuts to Legal Aid Ontario will place an undue and increased burden on the City of Toronto. More people facing unlawful evictions without access to legal aid counsel will mean more demands on our already-overburdened shelter system. More people who become sick, injured or unemployed will be unable to challenge unlawful refusals of income support programs and will have to rely on Ontario Works, which is run by the municipality. More people unable to navigate the complex refugee determination system will mean more undocumented people seeking access to City services. It will also undermine a City Councillor's ability to effectively refer constituents to community clinics.

The Province of Ontario should ensure their most vulnerable residents have access to proper legal services by properly funding Legal Aid Ontario. These cuts, like others the province have announced, will download more burden onto Toronto taxpayers.

This motion is urgent as the recent Legal Aid Ontario funding cuts within the recent Ontario budget will have an immediate impact on low-income Toronto residents and city services.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM7.14