



**OPIRG-Toronto**  
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**RE: Mergers of GTA Legal Aid Clinics.**

X July 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

Ontario Public Interest Research Group-Toronto condemns the proposed merger of seventeen independent community legal clinics in the Greater Toronto Area into a small number of mega-clinics.

As with the organizations in the legal community and other voices throughout the GTA, OPIRG-Toronto is concerned that this amalgamation does not reflect a model of community lawyering that responds to the needs of marginalized peoples. The impacts of these changes on low-income communities, disabled persons, and many others will be devastating as services which are responsive and specialized to their particular needs. Removed from these communities, legal services will be uprooted from the direct connections which have built successes over the decades in the GTA.

Rather, we believe that increased funding is needed in areas that are reflective of community needs. As poverty rises in Toronto, cuts to service, space and staff are entirely unacceptable. Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) and the Province of Ontario must instead ensure that existing clinics are adequately resourced with enough lawyers, community legal workers, and administrative staff to deliver services to the GTA's diverse communities. Meanwhile, the planning for the future of the GTA's legal clinics, as guided by the GTA Legal Clinics' Transformation Project, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), and the Province of Ontario must meet these ends, rather than uprooting legal services from local communities.

We demand that Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) and the Province of Ontario ensure access to justice by providing increased funding to existing community legal clinics in catchment areas with high levels of poverty. Additionally, it is our belief that any major clinic transformation should only occur after meaningful, extensive, and widespread consultation with clinic-users and low-income communities.

All the best,

The Board of Directors of OPIRG Toronto

CC:

Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario

Madeleine Meilleur, Attorney-General of Ontario

John McCamus, Board Chair of Legal Aid Ontario

Bob Ward, CEO and President of Legal Aid Ontario

Jack de Klerk, Co-Chair of the GTA Legal Clinics Transformation Project Steering Committee

Marjorie Hiley, Co-Chair of the GTA Legal Clinics Transformation Project Steering Committee