

MPP Roman Baber, Chair
Standing Committee on Justice Policy
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON, M7A 1A2

cc. Committee Clerk Christopher Tyrell

Mr. Barber,

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy is reviewing Bill 161, which makes amendments to the Legal Aid Services Act.

Alongside many other members of my community, I demand that the ability of Ontario's community legal clinics to serve marginalized people in my city and across Ontario be preserved. I recently moved back to Hamilton, Ontario after living for many years in Toronto, and both cities are rife with systemic access-to-justice issues that criminalize poverty and contribute to the incarceration of low-income and racialized communities at a rate out of step with demographics and crime rates in both cities. The grassroots work done by community legal clinics to provide fair and equitable access to justice is essential to community well-being and is a first small step to recognizing and resolving the much larger issues of racial injustice, police violence, and the militarization and carceralization of our state institutions.

Preserving legal clinics' ability to serve marginalized people requires the following changes to be made to the draft bill:

1. The specific commitment to "access to justice" for low-income and disadvantaged communities must be reinstated to the Purpose of the legislation.
2. Community legal clinics must be recognized as the foundation for the provision of clinic law services.
3. Obligations to provide legal aid services across Ontario must be reinstated
4. The definition of community legal clinic must encompass the following:
A community legal organization structured as an independent corporation without share capital:
 - (a) whose board of directors are members of the community or communities served, or who have a substantial association or interest in the community or communities served;
 - (b) that provides legal aid services for the community it serves on a basis other than fee for service; and,
 - (c) that determines the legal needs of the individuals and communities served by the community legal clinic.

This is of dire of importance to me and my community. Amidst a collective moment of examining and reforming our institutions so that they serve all Ontarians equitably, the changes we demand to this bill are a small but important step the committee can take to demonstrate their commitment to justice for all.

Sincerely,

Avril McMeekin

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