



**Neighbourhood
Legal Services**
LONDON AND MIDDLESEX

June 12, 2020

Standing Committee on Justice Policy
c/o Committee Clerk, Christopher Tyrell
Legislative Assembly of Ontario
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2

RE: Submission to Standing Committee on Justice Policy – Bill 161

Neighbourhood Legal Services (London & Middlesex) Inc. is a poverty law clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. We have been providing legal services to low-income residents of London and Middlesex for over 30 years. Each year we provide legal advice and representation to thousands, helping to keep food on the table and a roof over the heads of the most vulnerable members of our community. We provide legal assistance in the areas of income maintenance (Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program), Canada Pension Plan Disability, Employment law for precariously employed workers, Workers' Rights, Criminal Injuries and Victim Compensation, and Housing law for tenants. We also engage in law reform activities with all levels of government, and provide public legal education in all of our areas of law.

We respectfully submit to the Committee that we have serious concerns about Bill 161 in terms of the removal of the ability of community legal clinics to determine the legal needs of the individuals and the communities they serve. The current draft would appear to give Legal Aid Ontario, the central funding bureaucracy, the final determination over the practice of local community legal clinics across the province. This undermines the important role of community legal clinics, each governed by its own Board of Directors,

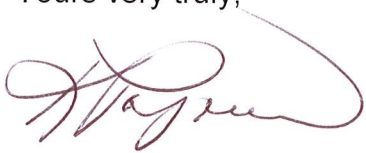
as uniquely situated to make the most informed and empirically based determinations of local need and focus. We submit that it must be each local clinic that determines local services. Clinic boards would continue to account to LAO that they have in fact assessed the needs of their communities and are providing services in accordance with those needs. We submit that service determination must be in the hands of the local organization, which is closest to the service recipient, with oversight appropriately left to the funder.

We submit that Bill 161 is fundamentally flawed in providing an express provision for only LAO to determine the legal needs of individuals and communities in Ontario for legal aid services. Although LAO is required to have regard to determinations by community legal clinics of the legal needs of the communities they serve, under the Bill, it is still LAO that makes the determination. Any reference to specific duties of a clinic board of directors, as well as the mandated role for clinic boards to determine the legal needs of its community, have been removed from the new Bill.

Finally, we respectfully submit that we support and endorse the Submissions of the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario, their thorough analysis of the Bill, and all of their recommendations.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this very important piece of legislation.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'K. Pagniello', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Kristina M. Pagniello
Acting Executive Director