



July 4, 2017
 A02-40

Sent via email to:

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Catherine Fife, MPP (Kitchener—Waterloo) cfife-qp@ndp.on.ca

Dear MPs and MPPs,

Re: CSD-IP-17-02, Immigration Partnership Report on Legal Aid Ontario Budget Deficit

Please be advised that the Council of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo at their regular meeting held on June 28, 2017, approved the following resolution:

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo advocate with the Federal and Provincial Governments to provide adequate funding to Legal Aid Ontario to avoid cuts to its immigration and refugee law services; and
That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo forward this report to local Members of the Provincial and Federal Parliaments and the other refugee settlement communities in Ontario (Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London and Windsor) for their information and action.

Enclosed please find a copy of report CSD-IP-17-02. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Tara Bedard, Executive Director, Immigration Partnership at 519-575-4757 ext: 3171 or tbedard@regionofwaterloo.ca.

2458747

Regards,



Tim Brubacher
Council/Committee Support Specialist

TB/vc

cc: Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Community Services
Tara Bedard, Executive Director, Immigration Partnership
Ottawa City Clerk and Solicitor, Rick O'Connor rick.oconnor@ottawa.ca
Toronto City Clerk, Ulli S. Watkiss, clerk@toronto.ca
Hamilton City Clerk, Rose Caterini, clerk@hamilton.ca
London City Clerk, Cathy Saunders, csaunder@london.ca
Windsor City Clerk/Licence Commissioner, Valerie Critchley
clerks@citywindsor.ca



Report: CSD-IP-17-02

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Immigration Partnership

To: Chair Ken Seiling and Members of Regional Council

Date: June 28, 2017

File Code: A02-40

Subject: Immigration Partnership Report on Legal Aid Ontario Budget Deficit

Recommendation:

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo advocate with the Federal and Provincial Governments to provide adequate funding to Legal Aid Ontario to avoid cuts to its immigration and refugee law services; and

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo forward this report to local Members of the Provincial and Federal Parliaments and the other refugee settlement communities in Ontario (Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London and Windsor) for their information and action.

Summary:

Nil

Report:

Very recently, Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) announced its intention to cut 40% of all refugee and immigration law services beginning on July 1st 2017 due to budgetary constraints. These cuts, estimated by LAO to be worth \$13.1 million, will significantly impact and put at risk the lives of thousands of people in Ontario. At the end of June 26, LAO announced it will continue immigration and refugee services at the current level for now but that suspension of service may occur in the future unless a funding solution can be negotiated with the federal government.

This report comes directly to Regional Council due to the emergent nature of the topic

and the potential for imminent negative impact on Waterloo Region residents.

Waterloo Region is a resettlement community for immigrants and refugees. It is also a hub for refugee claimants who have arrived in this community seeking Canada's protection. Over 22% of the population are immigrants and refugees. Each year around 100 refugee claimants arrive in Waterloo Region. There are currently around 1,000 claimants whose cases are pending in Waterloo Region. Those vulnerable residents will be directly impacted by the proposed cut to the immigration and refugee law program.

Refugee claimants living in Waterloo Region need the services provided by organizations like LAO to fairly navigate the complex refugee determination system. Other refugees and immigrants also require access to LAO legal services.

Community organizations in Waterloo Region provide essential settlement services to refugees and immigrants. They help them access legal services provided by LAO. They do not have the capacity to provide legal services if LAO cuts immigration and refugee law services.

The consequences of inadequate legal representation can be serious. Refugee claimants will not have access to legal advice and representation. The number of negative decisions on asylum claims will increase. Poor or inadequate representation leads to wrong decisions that can result in removal to a situation of persecution, torture or death. Negative decisions may also result in more appeals and further backlog the legal system.

Legal Aid Ontario has asked the federal and provincial governments to increase their financial contribution to cover the \$13.1 million deficit. The Immigration Partnership Council supports this funding increase for this fiscal year and on an ongoing basis. It has asked the Federal and Provincial governments together to ensure there is no reduction of legal representation for refugees and immigrants in Ontario, and requested that Waterloo Region's federal and provincial elected representatives champion this matter on behalf of refugees and immigrants in our community.

Corporate Strategic Plan:

This report addresses the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan 2015-2018, Focus Area 4: Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities and Strategic Objective 4.2: Mobilize efforts to reduce poverty and the impacts it has on Waterloo Region residents; Focus Area 5: Responsive and Engaging Government Services and Strategic Objective 5.2: Provide excellent citizen-centred services.

Financial Implications:

Nil

Other Department Consultations/Concurrence:

Nil

Attachments

Attachment A: Immigration Partnership Letter

Prepared By: Tara Bedard, Executive Director, Immigration Partnership

Approved By: Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Community Services

Attachment A



23 June 2017

To:

Hon. Bardish Chagger, M.P. (Bardish.Chagger@parl.gc.ca)
Marwan Tabbara, M.P. (marwan.tabbara@parl.gc.ca)
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Michael Harris, M.P.P. (michael.harris@pc.ola.org)
Catherine Fife, M.P.P. (cfife-co@ndp.on.ca)

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) has announced its intention to cut 40% of all refugee and immigration law services beginning on July 1st 2017 due to budgetary constraints. These cuts, estimated by LAO to be worth \$13.1 million, will significantly impact and put at risk the lives of thousands of people in Ontario.

Waterloo Region is a resettlement community for immigrants and refugees. It is also a hub for refugee claimants who have arrived in this community seeking Canada's protection. Over 22% of the population are immigrants and refugees. Each year around 100 refugee claimants arrive in Waterloo Region. There are currently around 1,000 claimants whose cases are pending in Waterloo Region. Those vulnerable residents will be directly impacted by the proposed cut to the refugee law program.

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership is collaboration of over 100 non-profit, municipal, business and post-secondary partners and community members working together to facilitate the successful settlement and community integration of immigrants and refugees. Refugee claimants living in Waterloo Region need the services provided by organizations like LAO to fairly navigate the complex refugee determination system. Other refugees and immigrants also need access to LAO supports.

Partner organizations in Waterloo Region provide essential settlement services to refugees and immigrants. They help them access legal services provided by LAO. They do not have the capacity to provide legal services if LAO cuts immigration and refugee law services.

The consequences of inadequate legal representation will be serious. Refugee claimants will not have access to legal advice and representation. The number of negative decisions on asylum claims will increase. Poor or inadequate representation leads to wrong decisions that can result in removal to a situation of persecution, torture or death. Negative decisions may also result in more appeals and further backlog the system.

We understand that Legal Aid Ontario has asked the federal and provincial governments to increase their financial contribution to cover the \$13.1 million deficit. The Immigration Partnership supports this funding increase for this fiscal year and on an ongoing basis. We ask that the Federal and Provincial governments together ensure there is no reduction of legal representation for refugees and immigrants in Ontario. As Waterloo Region's federal and provincial elected representatives, we ask you to champion this matter on behalf of refugees and immigrants in our community.



We look forward to working with you and welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in person. You can reach us through Tara Bedard (tbedard@regionofwaterloo.ca or 519.575.4757 x3171).

On behalf of the Immigration Partnership Council:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Donahue".

Peter Donahue
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Terry".

Linda Terry
Vice Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tara Bedard".

Tara Bedard
Executive Director