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Ontario

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Mr. Steve Pengelly  
Chair  
Legal Aid Ontario  
40 Dundas Street West, Suite 200  
Toronto, ON  
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Email: [pengellys@lao.on.ca](mailto:pengellys@lao.on.ca)

Dear Mr. Pengelly:

I am pleased to share our government's 2023-24 priorities for Legal Aid Ontario (LAO).

As Chair, you play a vital role in helping LAO achieve its mandate. It is important that your agency's goals, objectives, and strategic direction continue to align with our government's priorities and direction. As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario and ensure that they provide value for money to taxpayers. Agencies are also required to adhere to government policies and directives.

Per the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for LAO for 2023-24. These priorities include:

**1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management**

- Identifying and pursuing opportunities for revenue generation through partnerships, where appropriate.
- Identifying efficiencies and savings through innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability.
- Continue to promote and maintain the agency's financial sustainability so that it can deliver all of its core mandated client services and strategic initiatives.
- Operate within the agency's financial allocations.
- Complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization, including contract harmonization for planned and pending procurements, accounting practices and realty interim measures for agency office space.
- Leveraging and meeting benchmarked outcomes for compensation strategies and directives.

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## 2. Transparency and Accountability

- Abiding by applicable government directives and policies and ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting.
- Adhering to accounting standards and practices, and responding to audit findings, where applicable.
- Identifying appropriate skills, knowledge and experience needed to effectively support the board's role in agency governance and accountability.

## 3. Risk Management

- Developing and implementing an effective process for the identification, assessment, and mitigation of agency risks, including COVID-19 impacts and any future emergency risks.

## 4. Workforce Management

- Optimizing your organizational capacity to support the best possible public service delivery, including redeploying resources to priority areas, where needed.
- Supporting the implementation of the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI) by identifying opportunities to relocate new or existing agencies to lower cost communities.

## 5. Diversity and Inclusion

- Developing and encouraging diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace.
- Adopting an inclusion engagement process to ensure all voices are heard to inform policies and decision-making.
- Continue to engage, collaborate, and support Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized communities to address the unique systemic barriers that they face in the justice system.
- Working collaboratively to respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's* "calls to action".
- Developing and supporting distinct policies and programs that address the over-representation of Indigenous and Black people in the criminal justice system and child welfare system.
- Ensuring that digitization and other modernization strategies do not create access to justice barriers for marginalized people who may not have access to technology.

## 6. Data Collection

- Improving how the agency uses data in decision-making, information sharing and reporting, to inform outcome-based reporting and improve service delivery.
- Increasing data sharing with Supply Ontario when applicable regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making.
- Working to collect race-based data from bail clients and sharing with the ministry as per its requirements under the *Anti-Racism Act, 2017*.

## **7. Digital Delivery and Customer Service**

- Exploring and implementing digitization for online service delivery to ensure customer service standards are met.
- Using a variety of approaches or tools to ensure service delivery in all situations, including pursuing delivery methods that have evolved since COVID-19.

These are the government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies. Please see the attached guide for further details of each priority.

I am also sharing several priorities specific to LAO:

### **1. Supporting the Court Recovery Process**

- Working collaboratively with the ministry as it plans and executes strategies to reduce the court backlog.

### **2. IT Modernization Project**

- Working collaboratively with the ministry to support IT modernization.

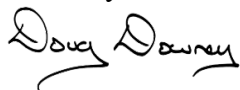
### **3. Addressing Internal Audit Review Recommendations**

- As part of the 2021-22 OPS-Wide Audit Plan, an Audit of LAO's Financial Management and Forecasting Processes was conducted by Treasury Board Secretariat's Ontario Internal Audit Division (OIAD).
- A final draft report shared by OIAD in August 2022 identified several recommendations for the agency and the ministry.
- In 2023-24, LAO is expected to prioritize the implementation of recommendations outlined in the final draft audit report and include these activities within its operational planning.

I look forward to learning how these priorities will be reflected in the agency's upcoming business plan and in ongoing agency operations.

Thank you and your fellow board members for your continued commitment to LAO. Your work and ongoing support is invaluable to me and the people of Ontario. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jane Mallen, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Policy Division, at [jane.n.mallen@ontario.ca](mailto:jane.n.mallen@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,



Doug Downey  
Attorney General

Attachment: Government Priorities for Agency Sector Chart