

Fact sheet

Duty counsel services

Contact us

Toll-free: **1-800-668-8258**

TTY service for the hearing impaired: **1-866-641-8867**

Service is available Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Online

Visit **legalaid.on.ca** for more information on Legal Aid Ontario's services.

Legal Aid Ontario's (LAO) duty counsel are lawyers at courthouses who can step in to help people who need immediate legal support.

They can:

- quickly assess legal problems
- provide advice and information
- in some cases, represent someone who would otherwise be unrepresented

Clients have the right to represent themselves in court, but it's highly recommended that they speak to duty counsel before going into the courtroom.

Criminal duty counsel

Criminal duty counsel can:

- advise about legal rights, obligations and the court process
- help in the courtroom with adjournments, bail hearings, guilty pleas, and sentencing
- help with diversion matters

Family duty counsel

Family duty counsel can:

- advise about legal rights, obligations and the court process
- help negotiate and settle issues
- review and help prepare court documents
- help in the courtroom for child protection hearings, garnishment and support hearings, request adjournments, argue motions

- help in interim, pre-trial and show cause hearings for issues like custody, access, child protection or support where the issues are not complicated
- refer clients to other sources for help such as mediation, a legal aid worker in the courthouse, a district office, a community legal clinic, or the toll-free telephone number to apply for representation by a private lawyer.

Mental health duty counsel

For someone appearing in mental health court for a criminal matter, duty counsel can help at first appearance. After, if the person cannot apply for legal aid on their own, they can get help through:

- criminal duty counsel or a criminal lawyer with experience representing clients with mental health issues
- a legal aid representative or a Patient Advocate/Rights advisor in the mental health facility the client is at

Tenant duty counsel

At most Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal locations, tenant duty counsel are available to:

- advise about legal rights, obligations and the tribunal process
- review and help prepare court documents
- help with mediation, negotiation and representation in certain matters
- provide public legal education and referrals for other services

Brydges hotline for those entering custody

LAO's Brydges duty counsel service provides quick and timely legal advice for every Ontarian detained or arrested. It's available to everyone—whether or not they qualify for legal aid. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in English and French, as well as any other language through an interpreter.

The person in custody needs to let the police officer know that they would like to speak to duty counsel. The officer will call the hotline, and duty counsel will call to speak with the accused within 30 minutes.