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## MEETING WITH YOUR FEDERAL MP TO END LEGAL AID CRISIS

June 2019 - The Refugee Lawyers Association of Ontario (RLA) and the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) are calling on the Federal Government to:

- Halt the deportations of individuals who are deprived of access to a lawyer because of the legal aid cuts
- Urgently work with the Province to find a new funding formula, and resolve the crisis

This information sheet provides a step-by-step guide to setting up a meeting with your Federal MP to communicate this call.

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### Setting up a Meeting with your MPP

1. Find the Constituency Office of your MP: Simply plug your postal code into this online search form to locate your MP:

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/constituencies/FindMP>

2. Call and introduce yourself: Mention that you are a constituent of theirs, and tell them that you would like to meet with your MP at the constituency office to discuss your concerns about cuts to legal aid for refugees and immigrants.
  3. Timing:
    - a. Let them know these cuts have already taken effect, and that you'd like to meet as soon as possible.
    - b. You will need about 30 minutes for the meeting.
    - c. You should expect the meeting to be scheduled within a week. This is a crisis situation.
  4. If you are asked for specifics about why you want to meet, you could say that the legal aid cuts by the province were abrupt and unilateral, and we are facing a human rights crisis as a result. Tell them you are concerned that the consequences of the crisis will be severe and irreversible, especially if people who need legal aid are removed from Canada during the crisis.
  5. Write down the name of the person you are talking to at the constituency office. Be polite and friendly.
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## Goals and Information for Meeting with Your MPP

### 1. Briefly educate your MP about Legal Aid services for refugees and immigrants

Expect that your MP will know very little about legal aid, and the work of immigration and refugee lawyers. Be prepared to explain these services for a non-lawyer audience. Keep the communication “high-level”.

Some helpful background:

- Legal Aid provides Ontarians living below the poverty line (under \$17,000 in annual income) with access to a lawyer when their fundamental rights and freedoms are at stake.
- Until Tuesday, April 16, 2019, when the service was abruptly discontinued, Legal Aid services had been available for:
  - Refugee claimants to prepare for hearings, as well as meritorious appeals;
  - Humanitarian applications;
  - Immigration detention hearings;
  - Permanent Residents facing removal from Canada
- Refugee and immigration services are a small portion of the overall LAO budget.

### 2. Brief your MP on the effects of the cuts

- Cuts were made abruptly, and have caused significant representation gaps for people facing refugee hearings, the possibility of removal from Canada, and immigration detention;
- People who are eligible for legal aid can't afford a lawyer; we expect that many if not most people will end up unrepresented in these high stakes proceedings;
- This is a human rights crisis. The impact on the lives of Ontario's most vulnerable is very real, and the effects will be irreversible;
- There are likely members of their constituency (individuals, families, and children) who are experiencing the effects of these cuts; **the absence of legal assistance will increase the burden on MP offices;**
- The cuts will cause significant delays in the immigration system and in the courts.

### 3. Explain what we need from the Federal Government

- While we strongly condemn the abrupt and unilateral withdrawal of legal aid by the Province, and will continue to pressure the Provincial Government to reverse this harmful decision, there is also an important role for the Federal Government in guarding against the worst consequences of the cuts;
- The Federal Government has authority over removals, and must ensure that nobody who needs legal aid during the funding crisis is removed from Canada without representation by a lawyer;
- The Federal Government should also urgently come to the table to resolve the funding crisis with the Provincial Government

### 4. Find out if the MP has any questions or areas of concern

- Be sure to ask if the MP has any questions you can answer (you can also provide them with answers after the meeting if you don't have the answers at the time);
- Ask them who else you should be talking to on this issue.

5. Secure a commitment - if possible - that the MP is willing to provide their support by

- If a member of the Government (Liberal):
    - **speaking with Finance Minister Morneau about resolving the funding crisis with the province;**
    - discussing the issue with the other relevant Ministers: Ministers Goodale, Hussen, Lametti, Blair;
    - raising the issue in caucus
  - If a member of the Opposition (NDP or Conservative):
    - asking a question in the House of Commons
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