

Legal organizations make it easier for lawyers to do pro bono work

Community groups, charitable organizations and some of the most vulnerable Ontario citizens will have easier access to legal services, thanks to a concerted effort on the part of legal organizations to encourage lawyers to donate their services to clients or organizations in need

The most recent move enhances the liability insurance coverage for lawyers undertaking pro bono work, and gives lawyers doing pro bono legal work a break on some of their insurance charges.

“This is a ground-breaking initiative and a major step forward in encouraging lawyers to provide legal services on a pro bono basis,” said Professor Vern Krishna, the top elected official at the Law Society of Upper Canada. “As the regulator of the legal profession in Ontario, it is our mandate to govern in the public interest, and that includes helping to make legal services more accessible.”

In addition to providing direct access to justice programs such as the highly popular Lawyer Referral Service, which helps members of the public find lawyers in the areas they need, the Law Society has been working closely with other partners to establish Pro Bono Law Ontario.

Created last year, PBLO is a province-wide umbrella organization, bringing lawyers willing to volunteer their services a step closer to organizations and individuals who desperately need them.

“Our goal at the Law Society is to ensure all Ontarians, no matter who they are, no matter where they are and no matter how much they make, have access to our justice system. These steps help make that goal closer to reality,” said Krishna.

PBLO and its Executive Director Lynn Burns were instrumental in helping to pave the way for the break in insurance charges for lawyers doing pro bono work. LAWPRO, the (Lawyers’ Professional Indemnity Company) will now waive the insurance deductible – usually \$5,000 per claim – on lawsuits arising out of qualified pro bono work.

As well, these lawyers will not have to pay a claims history surcharge – an additional charge of a minimum of \$2,500 per claim – for claims arising out of their pro bono legal services.

“As the insurer to the legal profession in Ontario, we are pleased to do our part to support the work of the Law Society and to assist members of the legal profession in improving access to justice in Ontario,” said Frank Marrocco, Chair of LAWPRO.

As well, to encourage retired lawyers, and those who work in corporate settings or in government or the education sector, to undertake pro bono work, LAWPRO will provide

lawyers with a reduced level of liability insurance coverage for their approved pro bono legal services. (Because of their status, these lawyers normally would be able to exempt themselves from having to buy insurance coverage and would not be insured for legal services they provide.) LAWPRO will provide this reduced level of coverage to these exempt lawyers, free of charge, thus eliminating what was perceived as a stumbling block to providing pro bono legal services. As well, they will not have to pay an insurance deductible in the event of a claim arising out of these services.

“These changes will provide lawyers with an additional measure of comfort and, we hope, encourage many more practitioners – both those in active practice and those who are retired or working as employees in corporations or government circles – to come forward and participate in pro bono work.”

“This initiative sends an important signal to lawyers by making it easier for them to donate their services to groups and individuals in need,” said Ron Manes, PBLO President.

“Many lawyers already donate their services free of charge, and we know from experience that many more lawyers would like to. PBLO helps connect these lawyers with pro bono opportunities. Now thanks to this initiative, lawyers will have an added incentive to do pro bono work.”

Local residents and lawyers wanting more information about the Law Society and Pro Bono Law Ontario should go to the following web addresses:

www.lsuc.on.ca or <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/news/factst/justicefs.jsp#o2>

For more information about participating in Pro Bono Law Ontario, please contact Lynn Burns, Executive Director at 416-947-5275.

To learn more about LAWPRO, go to www.lawpro.ca

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