



**LAW COMMISSION OF ONTARIO
COMMISSION DU DROIT DE L'ONTARIO**

BACKGROUND

Best Practices at Family Justice System Entry Points: Users' Needs and Workers' Responses in the Justice System

There is widespread agreement among users of and workers in the family justice system that the system is in need of significant reform. The Law Commission of Ontario released its recommendations in its first family law project on pension division at marriage breakdown in October 2008 and a number of them were enacted into legislation. In 2008 and early 2009, the LCO conducted a consultation process to determine what other family law issues most urgently needed reform.

The LCO held a Family Law Roundtable in September 2008, attended by members of the bar, academics, government representatives, family information centre workers, the judiciary and individuals from community organizations, all of whom were particularly active in the area of family law. The Roundtable enabled the LCO to discuss and narrow down project possibilities to two options, one related to process and one to substantive law. In January 2009, the LCO circulated a paper describing the two project options to stakeholders. Although responses were supportive of both options, overall we have concluded that process issues would benefit most Ontarians.

Accordingly, the LCO Board of Governors approved a project entitled "Best Practices at Family Justice System Entry Points: Users' Needs and Workers' Responses in the Justice System" in April 2009. The project's goal was to explore the following questions:

- How do Ontarians find their way to the legal system when they experience family conflicts?
- What kind of information and services do they receive at these entry points?
- How can system workers best orient users and facilitate early conflict resolution?

The LCO has now begun extensive consultations leading to the development of recommendations to improve the family system. It has issued a Consultation Paper to guide participants during consultations. It provides background on various current family and access to justice projects in Ontario. It lists a series of questions that participants can use in providing their feedback. It also explains how Ontario organizations and individuals can contact the LCO to set up

consultation meetings in their communities. The LCO will consult with both family justice system users and workers.

Following these consultations, during the first half of 2010, the LCO will conduct additional research and compile consultation results. It will release its final report and recommendations in November 2010.

As the LCO completed our family law Consultation Paper for release, the Attorney General of Ontario, the Honourable Chris Bentley, announced \$150 million in additional funding for Legal Aid Ontario. A portion of this funding will be allocated to the family process and to legal clinics serving people in poverty. We will follow the development of initiatives taken by the Attorney General and look forward to opportunities to work together on improving the family law system in Ontario.

More details regarding the LCO family justice project and fall consultations can be found on the LCO website.

If you have questions regarding this project, please contact us at (416) 650-8406 or as follows:

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