

The LCO's Project on Family Law PROJECT BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Project:

For too many people the family justice system adds to the pressures they are already facing in a family breakdown. Although there have been reforms over the past two years, many commentators continue to call for more substantive reform of the family justice system. The Law Commission of Ontario has undertaken a project that focuses on entry points to the system. The project also addresses the pluralist nature of the Ontario population.

What We Have Done So Far:

- organized a Roundtable of experts and front line workers from across the province;
- released a paper with options for a family law reform project;
- formed an advisory group made up of academics, legal and other service providers, advocates and representatives from government and community organizations;
- released a consultation paper;
- held consultations and released the results; and
- funded research papers from experts in the field on issues related to the project, and carried out considerable internal research.

What did we find?

Despite recent family justice reforms, the Ontario family justice system remains complex and fragmented. There are many sources of information, but the information is sometimes hard to access. Access to affordable legal advice and representation is a constant challenge. In practice, community organizations assist people in need of extra support, but there are few subsidized services for summary legal advice or specialized legal assistance. Family lawyers are not always accessible because of costs and availability. Family law information and referral services at the courthouse may be intimidating for some users.

Document Released to the Public Today:

- The Interim Report *Towards a More Efficient and Responsive Family Justice system*, with draft recommendations.

What do we recommend?

Among other draft recommendations, the LCO recommends:

- more early information through one basic brochure and one online website;
- more subsidized summary legal advice on family law;
- increased legal aid for persons trying to negotiate an agreement or trying to mediate a family dispute;

- linking information centres with community centres working with particular communities;
- in the long term, family centres across the province which offer comprehensive family justice services at entry point level, close to people's communities.

Next Steps:

The LCO seeks feedback from the public by April 30, 2012. We anticipate releasing a Final Report in mid-2012.