

## **Improving Access to Justice for Families** *Making the Family Court System Easier to Navigate*

**NEWS**

March 6, 2017

Ontario is helping families by making it easier for them to navigate family courts and access the legal assistance they need.

Last year, Ontario and the Law Society of Upper Canada asked the Honourable Annemarie E. Bonkalo to lead a review to consider whether a broader range of service providers could deliver certain family legal services.

Ontario and the Law Society are now [seeking public feedback](#) on Justice Bonkalo's recommendations. People can submit feedback online until May 15, 2017.

The province, together with the Law Society, plans to release an action plan by fall 2017 to address these recommendations.

In addition, Ontario has asked the federal government to support its plans to expand [Unified Family Courts](#) provincewide. Expanding these courts would streamline the family court process by ensuring Ontario families only have to go to one court to resolve their legal issues no matter where they live.

Improving access to justice for families is part of our plan to create jobs, grow the economy and help people in their everyday lives.

**QUOTES**

"We know that navigating the family justice system can be difficult and confusing – especially when you don't have access to qualified legal help. As a government and as a legal community, I know we can do better. I am grateful to Justice Bonkalo for proposing potential solutions, and I am committed to working with our partners in the justice sector and the federal government to help families get the help they need."

— Yasir Naqvi, Attorney General

"Justice Bonkalo's report is an important reminder that the family justice system in Ontario needs to evolve to ensure the public has timely access and competent representation. The province's clear commitment to the Unified Family Court expansion is welcome. As the legal regulator, we will work closely with Ontario and other partners to establish new paths to improve the public's experience in the family justice system."

— Paul Schabas, Treasurer, Law Society of Upper Canada

"As former Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice, I am a strong advocate of court modernization. I am pleased to present the results of this review to the Attorney General and the Law Society and to do my part in helping people access the legal services they need to resolve their family matters."

— Honourable Justice Annemarie E. Bonkalo, Ontario Court of Justice

## QUICK FACTS

- [Justice Bonkalo's final report](#) includes 21 recommendations to help make it easier for families to access the legal system, including creating a special licence that would allow paralegals to provide certain types of family legal services such as custody and divorces without property.
- In 2014-15 over 57 per cent of Ontarians did not have legal representation in family court.
- Over the past year, Justice Bonkalo consulted with dozens of groups and individuals from across the legal community, as well as those representing the interests of families in the justice system.
- Currently, Ontario has 17 Unified Family Courts located in Barrie, Bracebridge, Brockville, Cobourg, Cornwall, Hamilton, Kingston, L'Orignal, Lindsay, London, Napanee, Newmarket, Oshawa, Ottawa, Perth, Peterborough and St. Catharines.
- The Unified Family Court model allows families to go to one court to fully resolve their legal issues. In all other communities across the province, family law matters are divided between the Ontario Court of Justice and the Superior Court of Justice.
- Judicial appointments to the Unified Family Court fall under federal jurisdiction.
- The last expansion of the Unified Family Court took place in 1999.

## LEARN MORE

[Read and comment on Justice Bonkalo's recommendations.](#)

[Attorney General Yasir Naqvi's letter to Minister of Justice, Jody Wilson-Raybould.](#)

[The Law Society of Upper Canada](#)

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Clare Graham, Minister's office, [Clare.Graham@ontario.ca](mailto:Clare.Graham@ontario.ca),  
416-326-7071

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*Disponible en français*

Emilie Smith, Communications Branch, [MAG-Media@ontario.ca](mailto:MAG-Media@ontario.ca), 416-326-221

Orli Giroux Namian, Law Society of Upper Canada, Orli  
Giroux Namian, [ogiroux@lsuc.on.ca](mailto:ogiroux@lsuc.on.ca), 416-947-3336