



[Back to Layoffs coming to Ontario's legal aid program](#)

Layoffs coming to Ontario's legal aid program

November 05, 2009

Tracey Tyler

Ontario's legal aid program, already hit by a lawyers' boycott, plans to lay off staff to eliminate a \$56 million deficit.

The move follows an announcement earlier this week that British Columbia's legal aid system will lay off 54 employees, shut down its toll-free advice line and close five offices next year.

In an internal email today, Legal Aid Ontario president Bob Ward said financial pressures are forcing the agency to make "difficult but necessary" decisions about the size of its staff.

"Involuntary layoffs will occur," he said.

The move might seem perplexing, given the Ontario government's recent promise to pump an additional \$150 million into the legal aid program over the next five years. But in the memo, Ward said that extra money must be spent on defending clients and not applied to the program's "funding shortfall."

About \$40 million of the deficit is attributed to a drop in revenues from the Law Foundation of Ontario, which helps fund legal aid services with interest payments from lawyers' trust accounts.

"The program doesn't have adequate stable funding. Because it depends on law foundation money it's at the mercy of market forces," said Frank Addario, president of the Criminal Lawyers' Association.

It's the opposite of how one would expect a social program to work. You'd think it would have the capacity to do its best work in tough times," he said.

B.C. Attorney General Mike De Jong also blamed low interest rates for a drop in legal aid revenue in that province. B.C.'s legal aid budget is about \$74 million, while Ontario spends about \$300 million a year on its program.