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**Press Release
For Immediate Distribution**

Criminal Lawyers' Association Applauds Budget 2014's Funding for Legal Aid Ontario

May 1, 2014 – Toronto – The Criminal Lawyers' Association (CLA), the professional association representing criminal defense lawyers, is pleased with the 2014 Ontario Budget's commitment to support raising the income eligibility cutoff for access to Legal Aid services, and thanked the government for its investment in ensuring legal representation for Ontario's most vulnerable citizens.

"We applaud the government's recognition of the importance of Ontario's legal aid system," said Anthony Moustacalis, President of the Criminal Lawyers' Association. "This investment will allow an additional one million low income Ontarians to qualify for legal aid services. We know from experience that legal aid is an important factor in access to justice for those with limited means who find themselves in the criminal justice system. By issuing 75,000 additional Legal Aid certificates each year for low-income Ontarians, the government is helping to meet the real needs of the vulnerable through LAO's certificate program, which gives clients the right to counsel of choice."

Through Legal Aid Ontario's certificate program, vulnerable Ontarians in the criminal justice system are given the opportunity to choose their own lawyer to best represent them. This right to 'counsel of choice' is important to ensuring that Ontarians with very limited means have the ability to choose legal counsel that can best represent their interests. Often, this can include Aboriginal People and those suffering from mental illness – those who are most in need of effective representation.

"While this investment provides much-needed funding to Legal Aid Ontario, more work is required to ensure that Ontarians who are of very limited means have the ability to access the best lawyers possible through the Legal Aid System," continued Moustacalis. "The Criminal Lawyers' Association encourages the government to continue working with the CLA and other stakeholders to ensure that these Ontarians have access to the right to counsel of their choice through the private bar, which serves as the foundation of Legal Aid Ontario."

Criminal lawyers are an integral part of Ontario's Legal Aid system, and provide high-quality legal services to lower-income Ontarians in a cost-effective and efficient manner. The CLA has long been active in the debate about the importance of a strong, independent and well-funded legal aid program and the ability of CLA members to provide pro bono services as part of their commitment to social justice.

The Criminal Lawyers' Association (CLA) is one of the largest specialty legal organizations in Canada, with more than 1,100 members. The CLA is a voice for everyone concerned with criminal justice and civil liberties in Canada. Our advice and perspective is frequently sought by all levels of government and the judiciary on issues relating to legislation and the administration of criminal justice. The CLA also assists its members in every aspect of the practice of criminal litigation. A list of our membership and a more detailed description of our organization is located at <http://www.criminallawyers.ca>

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