

ANNUAL REPORT

2022 - 23

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RE-INFORCING OUR MISSION IN A YEAR OF CHANGE

The Legal Aid Alberta Board of Directors closes off the past year with a sense of great pride in the achievements of the entire organization, and confident in the future of Legal Aid Alberta.

It was a period of renewal as we turned our attention to redefining what is important to us and how we planned to achieve our goals. This included re-inforcing the role and approach the board was undertaking, by shifting from an inward facing, operational approach, to a governance-based board transparently, and with a clear plan. This was top of mind when we fine-tuned the Legal Aid Alberta Strategic Plan. This is a vital document that guides the organization forward for the coming three years.

Without a doubt, the most significant change is a new mission statement that more clearly defines who LAA serves and what we do for them:

"We resolve legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and, in doing so, protect the Rule of Law for the benefit of everyone."

This mission states plainly that LAA's services are directed mainly toward disadvantaged Albertans. It makes it clear that LAA staff and roster lawyers will go to the necessary lengths to resolve legal problems through negotiation, advocacy or at trial in our courts – whichever serves our clients best.

The new strategic plan focuses the organization on three priorities which can be summed up in three words: Quality. Access. Accountability. This means:

- Our clients are always served by highly effective lawyers.
- We will create a highly accessible justice system by making it easy for Albertans to apply for LAA services, regardless of their technical capacity or physical location.
- As a publicly funded organization, we administer the Legal Aid Plan in a responsible, cost-effective manner, providing the best coverage within an affordable funding envelope.

The plan is active. It connects each priority to a list of actions, expected results and measures of success for each priority.

Our board also made important contributions to renewing the Tariff of Fees, through an Ad Hoc Tariff Modernization Advisory Committee. Enthusiastic approval of the new tariff from the Ministry of Justice acknowledges the diligent work of the board, executive and administration on this project.

Another marker of success for the Board itself is membership. The Board of Directors this year welcomed four new, highly qualified members, appointed by the Law Society of Alberta. The appointees are: Jim Campbell, David Linder, KC, Randy Mitchell and Sonya von Heyking. All have been appointed to three-year terms.

We are grateful to former board members Michael Waite and Nancy Peck, who completed their board terms and made significant contributions to LAA.

And we extend our thanks and congratulations to former director Kent Teskey, KC, who has been appointed as a Justice of the Court of King's Bench of Alberta, in Edmonton.

This year, LAA is celebrating 50 years of advocating for disadvantaged Albertans. The evolution of this organization from a half-dozen lawyers mostly focused on handling family cases to an essential, highly effective organization of more than 300 staff, a network of 1,200 private practice roster lawyers all across the province and more than 35,000 active cases is inspiring.

As we move forward, we will draw on LAA's history of innovation and dedication as we serve Alberta's most disadvantaged citizens and support an effective and efficient justice system.

RYAN CALLIOUX, KC
*Chair, Board of Directors,
Legal Aid Alberta*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors supports LAA's goal of providing legal services and expertise, providing access to justice and fairness for all Albertans. The Board works with LAA in serving the public good and remaining accountable to Albertans. Direction and decisions of the Board of Directors and the strategic plan are implemented by the Executive Committee to support the legal aid business plan.

RYAN CALLIOUX, KC, BOARD CHAIR

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2016

Called to the Alberta bar in 2002, Ryan is an Edmonton-area Indigenous lawyer who has dedicated his professional legal career to helping families and children. Having practised family law for the past 20 years, he is an experienced litigator on family and child welfare cases and has advised government on risk management initiatives to reduce domestic violence and enhance legal services to protect children.

OWEN EDMONDSON

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2017

Retired after a 32-year career in finance and utility regulation, Owen is currently the vice chair of the Safety Codes Council, chair of the Handling Commission Review Committee of the Beverage Container Management Board, and a director of L'Arche Edmonton. Owen has a BSc and an MBA from the University of Alberta and is a CPA, CGA.

BRAD PICKERING

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2021

Brad is a retired Government of Alberta deputy minister, having served 17 years in various senior leadership roles as deputy minister of Municipal Affairs, chief executive officer of the Alberta Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Agency, deputy minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, deputy solicitor general/deputy minister of Public Security, and deputy minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Prior to joining the Government of Alberta, he spent 20 years in the municipal government sector and currently serves on the boards of Alberta Recycle Management Authority, Norquest College and the College of Social Workers.

CATHERINE BRAEUER

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2021

Catherine is a CPA, CA whose career has focused on finance, technology and corporate governance consulting for a variety of public and private organizations across North America including health care, education, children's aid and legal aid entities. Catherine holds a BA in Economics and Political Science and holds a U.S. CPA designation as well as designations in project management, information systems security and risk management. Catherine currently leads the Global Financial Reporting Transformation Team for Finning International.

HILARY ROSE, FCPA

Edmonton, Alberta

Director since 2016

Hilary is an FCPA, CA with broad experience in government, industry and academia. She has served on the boards of several not-for-profit organizations including the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Insurance Council and the National Film Board of Canada. She is a governor of the International Development Research Centre (a federal Crown corporation). Hilary is a member of the Institute of Corporate Directors and holds a BA in economics and political science and certifications in internal audit, risk management and client server computing systems.

KENT TESKEY

Edmonton, Alberta

Director 2021 - 2023

Kent practiced criminal law at the firm of Pringle Chivers Sparks Teskey. He is a past president of the Law Society of Alberta. Kent resigned from the Board of Directors on April 24, 2023 upon his appointment as a Justice of the Court of King's Bench of Alberta.

JIM CAMPBELL**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2022**

Jim is currently Vice President, Public Policy and Government Relations with MEG Energy. He is a senior business executive with more than 25 years of government, Indigenous and public affairs experience in diverse industries, including forestry, mining, telecommunications, and oil and gas. Jim also served as the executive director of one of Alberta's political parties. Jim's volunteer experience includes service on the boards of Mount Royal University, the Edmonton and Calgary public libraries and the Edmonton Art Gallery. Jim completed his Commerce degree at the University of Alberta and earned his MBA from the University of Calgary.

DAVID LINDER, KC**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2022**

David recently retired from the Alberta Securities Commission after having served over 25 years as its executive director. During his tenure at the Commission, David also was heavily involved in the executive committees of the Canadian Securities Administrators, the umbrella organization of Canada's provincial and territorial securities regulators whose objective is to improve, coordinate and harmonize regulation of the Canadian capital markets.

Prior to joining the Commission, David was a partner with the law firm of Parlee McLaws in Calgary. David has taught Business Law at the University of Calgary and chaired the fundraising committee of the U of C's Faculty of Law Alumni in its initial campaign.

RANDY MITCHELL**Calgary, Alberta****Director since 2022**

Randy is a lawyer in the Litigation and Dispute Resolution group at McLeod Law LLP. Randy practices in a wide variety of areas in all levels of courts of Alberta, including employment disputes, shareholder disputes and urban and rural lease and property disputes. Randy also participates in a variety of pro bono and access to justice initiatives in Alberta.

SONYA VON HEYKING**Lethbridge, Alberta****Director since 2022**

Sonya brings nearly 20 years of organizational governance experience from a variety of senior internal, and external board table perspectives. She is the Director, Accounting Program Development with the University of Lethbridge's Dhillon School of Business and teaches in the accounting program. Sonya also serves on the boards of Canada Helps and CPA Alberta and is an appointed public member on the Audit Committee for a local school division. Sonya holds the CPA, CA, ICD.D, and CIA designations, as well as certifications in risk management and internal controls from the Institute of Internal Auditors.

A PROUD RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT AND A PROMISING FUTURE



Legal Aid Alberta is celebrating its 50th year of providing legal support to Albertans. This milestone is remarkable because few organizations have the staying power to continue growing, evolving and improving for decades. Focusing on clients and effective service, LAA has had an enduring positive impact on the lives of Albertans for a half century.

This is testimony not only to the never-ending demand for legal aid services, but also to our continuous growth as an organization.

This past year we completed a review and renewal of the LAA Tariff. This payment structure governs the way LAA interacts with roster lawyers – the network of approximately 1,200 private practice lawyers who take files from LAA. We introduced efficiencies to simplify billing procedures and better matched recognition based on the complexity of the work they do.

The Government of Alberta implemented significant public policy improvements making our services available to more Albertans. Lowering the financial threshold to access services and increasing compensation for our roster lawyers marked a turning point in transforming access to justice in Alberta.

In addition, the province announced major investments in the justice system, including increased funding to Legal Aid Alberta. This increase recognizes years of hard work and innovations LAA has put into improving access to justice and operating in an effective, reliable and accountable manner, as a trusted justice system partner.

With this trust comes responsibility – including our continued work removing barriers to justice. We want to ensure all Albertans – regardless of access to technology, technical proficiency or geographic location – can easily access our services. The new LAA Client Gateway service empowers Albertans without access to phones or the Internet to access LAA.

Our renewed commitment to quality of legal advocacy is one of our strategic priorities. We've shown this in the creation of

five legal panels – groups of lawyers committed to developing a deep understanding of the law and court practices in a specific area of law. These panels concentrate on:

- Young people facing criminal charges.
- Children in high-conflict parenting matters.
- Parent and guardians in child welfare cases.
- Complainants and witnesses who have the right to respond to applications in criminal prosecutions. This usually involves sexual offence trials in which the complainant's medical or sexual history comes into question.
- Individuals accused of major crimes.

The outcome is that skilled lawyers with proven experience in specific practice areas provide more effective representation for their clients.

Demand for legal assistance never stops. On any given day, our 300 employees and 1,200 roster lawyers are solving complex legal problems for people across the province.

Right now, we're representing nearly 35,000 eligible clients and have more than 62,000 active files spanning 75 communities. In courtrooms and behind the scenes, we are breaking down barriers and making the justice system more accessible for hundreds of thousands of people.

We can take our first steps into LAA's next 50 years proud of our past and confident in a future where we protect the Rule of Law, for the benefit of everyone.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, belonging to G. John Panusa, KC.

G. JOHN PANUSA, KC
*President and CEO,
Legal Aid Alberta*

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Legal Aid Alberta's executive team leads our operations, policies, plans and budgets in alignment with our strategic plan. Taking direction from the Board of Directors, this team ensures LAA is fulfilling its mission of resolving legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and protecting the Rule of Law for the benefit of everyone.



G. JOHN PANUSA, KC
President and Chief Executive Officer

John is responsible for the overall operations of the organization and leads LAA's executive management team. He has overall responsibility for creating, planning, implementing and integrating the strategic direction of Legal Aid Alberta. He is responsible for co-ordination of the provincewide legal aid plan in accordance with the Governance Agreement. He is also LAA's liaison with the judiciary, the minister and Ministry of Justice, the Law Society of Alberta, the federal government, other legal aid plans in Canada, the legal community at large and the general public. John is the current Chair of the Association of Legal Aid Plans of Canada.



STEVE BURFORD, CPA, CGA
Vice-President, Finance and Technology

Steve leads all Finance and Technology services within LAA and ensures our systems and infrastructure enable our front-line staff to deliver high-quality legal services to our clients. This includes preparing budgets, business plans and sustainability plans for the Board of Directors and LAA's funders. He oversees the Information Technology, Finance and Accounting, Business Solutions and Reporting, and the Purchasing and Facilities functions.



DOUG INGERSOLL, BSc, LLB
General Counsel and Advisory Counsel Services

Doug oversees LAA processes, training and strategic initiatives to safeguard quality of services organizationally. Together with his Advisory Counsel Services Team, he ensures that LAA conducts business to the highest ethical standards and ensures it aligns with best practices and eliminates or mitigates all legal, regulatory and commercial risks. This includes managing client coverage appeals, providing legal advice to staff counsel on complex client matters as well as to business units/leaders on organizational initiatives, representing the interests of LAA or LAA clients at all levels of court, and advising senior management on internal legal matters.



LORI HAUGHIAN
Vice-President, Justice Services

Lori is primarily responsible for providing executive oversight for Justice Services within Legal Aid Alberta. This includes client intake and assessment services, appointing, client recoveries and certificate and tariff administration. She also guides and oversees the day-to-day operations of the LAA staff lawyer functions encompassing client certificate files and duty counsel services throughout the province.



LAURIE WANG, BA, MBA
Vice-President, People, Culture and Communications

Laurie oversees the Communications, Culture and Human Resources functions at Legal Aid Alberta. In addition to Board Governance and Policy Development, she is responsible for the leadership, strategy, and oversight of LAA values, culture and brand — telling the LAA story, recruiting and retaining the best talent, and engaging teams and the community.

ABOUT LEGAL AID ALBERTA

Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) is a not-for-profit organization that provides legal representation and support for Albertans facing legal issues.

A registered society incorporated under the provincial Societies Act, LAA is independent from government but accountable to Alberta's Ministry of Justice and to the Law Society of Alberta.

LAA provides legal services to clients in support of fairness in Alberta's justice system – services that help ensure Albertans in all circumstances understand and can defend their legal rights.

LAA operates on a hybrid service delivery model. LAA staff provide legal and other support services directly to Albertans, while the remaining services are provided by LAA roster lawyers. Members of the roster are independent Alberta lawyers who have registered with LAA to provide services on behalf of the organization.

Within its mandate, LAA is uniquely positioned to provide services that have a positive impact on the justice system and the lives of Albertans. This includes services like duty counsel for

all Albertans in courtrooms and elsewhere, services in support of emergency protection orders, services for Indigenous Albertans at the Siksika Nation, and support workers for youth and families in crisis.

When directed to do so by the courts, LAA also provides legal services on behalf of the Ministry of Justice to those who would not normally qualify.

LAA strives to be an employer of choice where employees are, and are recognized to be, some of the top experts in their fields. We are committed to sharing knowledge within the legal community, and working to support improvements to the Alberta judicial system.

Working with its funding partners, stakeholders and community, LAA provides targeted training for practising Alberta lawyers and the legal community on a range of topics, with the goal of better outcomes for the clients they represent.

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

The LAA vision statement focuses on tomorrow, on where we want to be, and on the direction our organization is headed. Our mission statement focuses on today, and on what we can do now to move toward our ideal future state.

In 2023, we updated our strategic plan – including a revised Mission, which more closely describes what we do and who we help. Our Vision and Values remain the same.

VISION

An Alberta where everyone is able to understand and protect their legal rights.

MISSION

We resolve legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and, in doing so, protect the Rule of Law for the benefit of everyone.

VALUES

Our organization strives to always focus on what matters, and to stay true to our values in everything we do. These values are the underpinning of our organization, reflecting on what is truly important to us. They guide us in the decisions we make every day.

WE ARE ONE

We work together in a collaborative and supportive manner to deliver unwavering and innovative services to our clients as one unified organization.

WE ARE PROTECTORS

We serve Albertans, often the most vulnerable of us, and work tirelessly to protect their rights and to ensure a fair process.

WE ARE EXCEPTIONAL

We are experts at what we do and we continually strive for improvement.

WE ARE INDEPENDENT

We operate and provide legal counsel free from outside involvement.

WHO WE SERVE

Legal issues can happen to anyone. Families unable to escape the threat of violence. Albertans unrepresented and confused in criminal court. People with limited financial means unable to pay for expensive court proceedings and trials. Significant numbers of Albertans depend on Legal Aid Alberta.



UNREPRESENTED AT COURT

Going to court for the first time can feel overwhelming. We provide brief legal advice in the form of duty counsel services for all unrepresented Albertans in courtrooms across the province, regardless of an individual's income.



UNDER ARREST AND HELD IN CUSTODY

Legal advice over the phone is available to any Albertan who has been arrested. LAA lawyers are available from 8 a.m. to midnight, 365 days per year, to inform, advise and even represent arrested people in bail hearings, all by telephone.



PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

We can help any Albertan obtain an Emergency Protection Order to stay safe from an abuser.



YOUTH CHARGED WITH A CRIME

All youth in Alberta are eligible to receive affordable, full service legal representation when charged with a crime.



No cost



Reduced cost



Eligibility requirements



Available to all Albertans



PEOPLE GOING THROUGH FAMILY BREAKDOWN

We help with matters related to parenting, guardianship, child support, property actions, spousal support and divorce.



ADULTS CHARGED WITH A CRIME

Individuals who are likely to receive a jail sentence may be eligible to receive full-service, affordable legal representation through to trial.



PARENTS INVOLVED IN CHILD WELFARE CASES

We can help with child welfare matters if your child has been taken away and you have been served with a guardianship or supervision application.



INDIVIDUALS WITH CHALLENGING PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

In addition to criminal charges, many of our clients face difficult personal challenges such as mental health issues, addiction or intergenerational trauma. We provide assistance to individuals dealing with their charges through Alberta's specialty courts.



REFUGEES AND NEWCOMERS TO CANADA

We help with refugee claims and appeals, detention status and deportation matters.



AISH RECIPIENTS

Albertans who are receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) are presumptively eligible for LAA services if their legal issue is covered by LAA.



No cost



Reduced cost



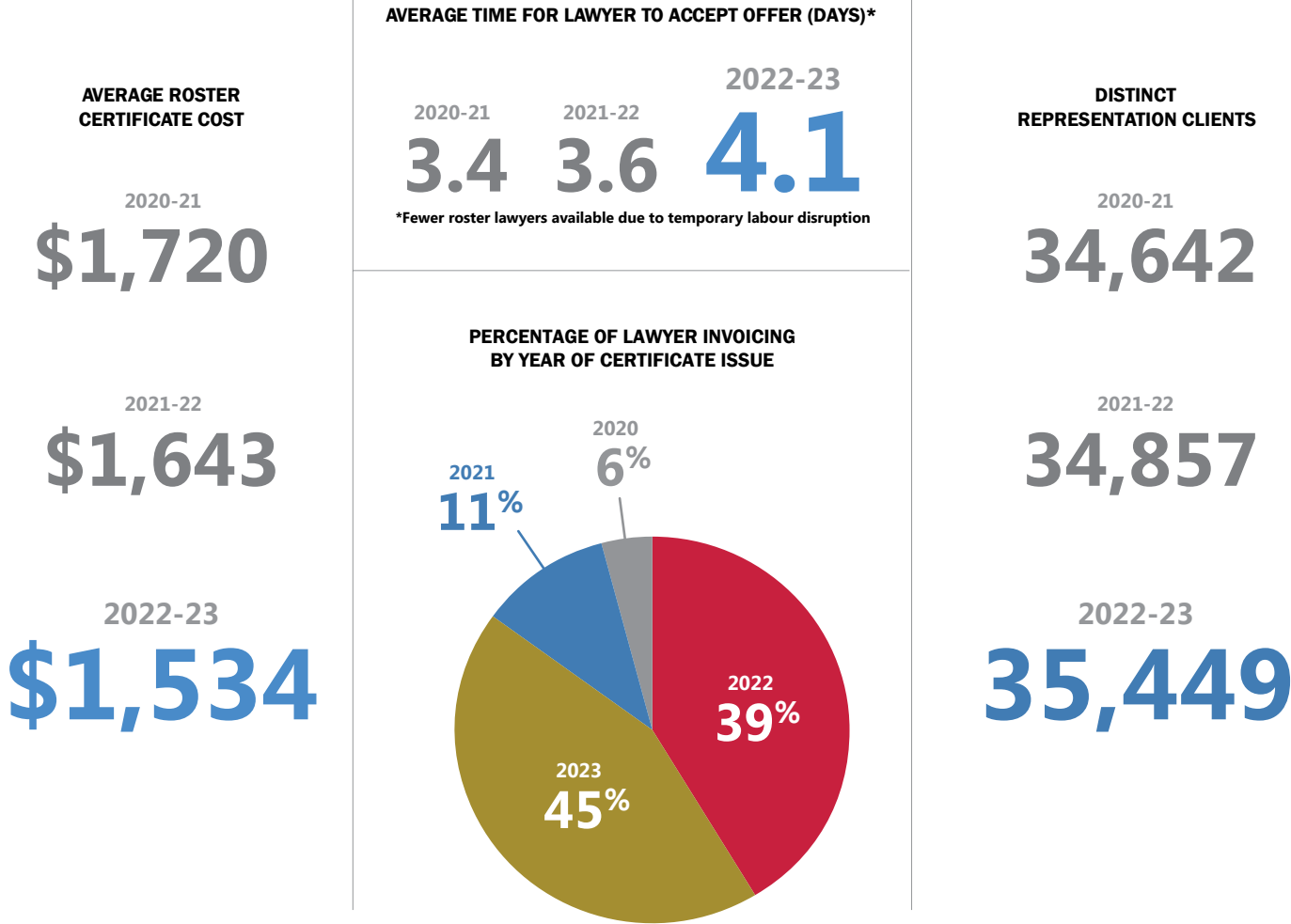
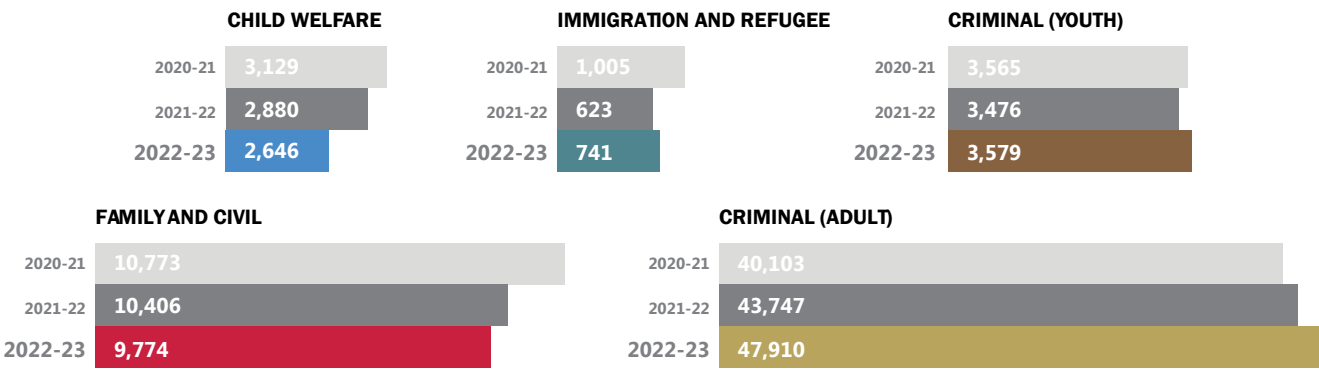
Eligibility requirements



Available to all Albertans

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

ACTIVE REPRESENTATION CERTIFICATES

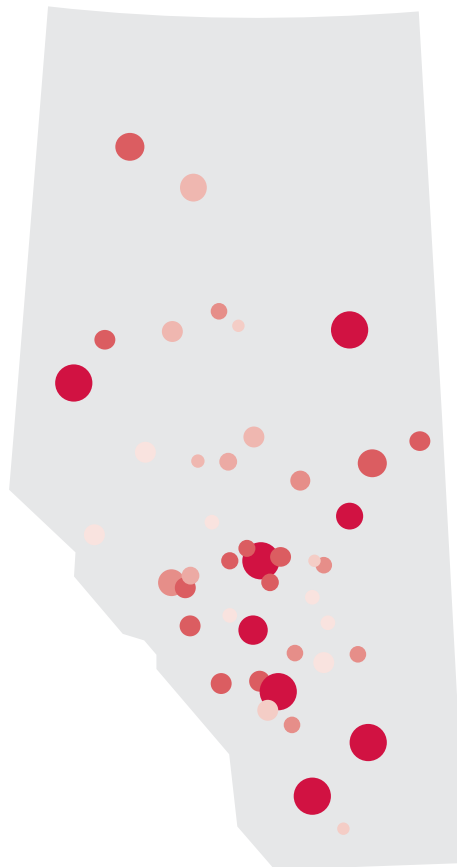


CERTIFICATES BY LOCATION

Legal Aid Alberta serves clients in every corner of the province.

LOCATION	CERTIFICATES
Edmonton	20,473
Calgary	16,552
Red Deer	2,814
Lethbridge	2,481
Grande Prairie	1,647
Wetaskiwin	1,497
Medicine Hat	1,464
St. Paul	1,168
Fort McMurray	1,118
Stony Plain	793
High Prairie	609
Leduc	556
Rocky Mountain House	537
Fort Saskatchewan	530
Peace River	523
Siksika Nation	491
Cold Lake	488
High Level	449
Cochrane	442
Lac La Biche	429
Cardston	418
Airdrie	371
Sherwood Park	363
Lloydminster	358
Bonnyville	349
Vegreville	342
Didsbury	301
Camrose	299
Wabasca-Desmarais	299
Drumheller	284
Drayton Valley	283
Strathmore	279

Whitecourt	277
Morinville	272
St. Albert	260
Hinton	241
Okotoks	227
Slave Lake	225
Edson	217
Athabasca	210
Chateh	210
Pincher Creek	205
Westlock	200



Ponoka	199
Fort Vermilion	194
Valleyview	188
Fort Macleod	172
Stettler	165
Barrhead	161
Brooks	138
Boyle	133
Wainwright	127
Taber	126
Red Earth Creek	124
Tsuu'tina Nation	123
Turner Valley	115
Vermilion	110
Fairview	109
Canmore	102
Alexis First Nation	101
Breton	84
Mayerthorpe	77
Evansburg	66
Grande Cache	53
Killam	50
Coronation	47
Rimbey	45
Jasper	38
Supreme Court of Canada	38
Hanna	33
Falher	32
Fort Chipewyan	26
Fox Creek	25
Edmonton Remand Centre	21
Bowden Institution	12
Other	55

LEGAL AID ALBERTA: INITIATIVES

INVESTING IN INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR ALBERTANS

Legal Aid Alberta is committed to finding new ways to support and serve Albertans in every corner of the province – from urban centres to remote communities – and to operate effectively and efficiently.

FIVE YEARS OF MILESTONES AND HIGHLIGHTS

Client Gateway

Legal Aid Alberta is improving access to justice for Albertans. Recognizing that not everyone is able to access our Contact Centre, we found a solution that helps address this issue. The Client Gateway is a secure online portal that allows lawyers and LAA partners and stakeholders to help existing criminal clients apply on the spot, in just a few minutes, by filling out an online form.

Tariff Modernization Project

In May 2022, Legal Aid Alberta initiated a review of the Tariff of Fees – the billing codes that roster lawyers use to invoice LAA. The Tariff Modernization Project increased efficiencies by simplifying the invoicing process and providing roster lawyers with the proper recognition for the complexity of work put into any given legal matter. The review led to Legal Aid Alberta's new, efficient tariff structure that came into effect on April 1, 2023.

Criminal Trial Group

Legal Aid Alberta's staff Criminal Trial Group (CTG) lawyers represent youth and adults who are facing criminal charges and who have had multiple lawyers. Additionally, these clients are often facing complex personal challenges such as mental health concerns, addiction, and housing issues. It's not always the complexity of the legal matter that is challenging; legal issues and personal issues often go hand in hand, which can increase the intricacy of the situation. This group also advances our ability to handle full-spectrum adult and youth criminal cases, from start to finish, including appeals.

Early Appearance Assistance

Early Appearance Assistance gives Albertans facing legal charges the ability to quickly access duty counsel over the phone during the 14 days before their first appearance in court. This helps callers understand what to expect at their first appearance and prepare for it. This service is decreasing the number of court appearances people make before their cases are resolved and reducing "churn" in the justice system.

Change of Counsel

Legal Aid Alberta is addressing breakdowns in client-lawyer relationships – situations that cannot be resolved – faster than ever before with our Change of Counsel initiative. Through this, we've improved procedures to substantially reduce delays in courts due to change of counsel requests when clients have no other recourse but to request a new or different lawyer.

Choice of Counsel

Clients can indicate their choice of counsel within a court district, within Alberta or across Canada depending on the seriousness of their charges. This allows clients in rural areas to have access to lawyers with a strong depth of experience. We have also adjusted travel compensation for roster lawyers to ensure rural Albertans have a meaningful choice of counsel, along with creating a fair system so lawyers are incentivized to work with clients outside of their immediate location.

Duty Counsel Triage Program

The Duty Counsel Triage Program allows for a client's criminal charges to be reviewed by a duty counsel for the purposes of matching the client with the best services for their needs. In some cases, duty counsel may be able to assist and in other cases the matter proceeds to have roster counsel appointed on.

Duty Counsel – Crown Disclosure

Our roster and staff duty counsel now have access to fulsome Crown disclosure. This means we are representing clients more effectively and are able to refer them to the service that best matches their needs.

Family Law Assessment

Our assessment team determines the appropriate number of hours to issue for family law certificates, reviews the merit of all property matters and can provide brief legal advice to help clients. They also provide referrals to Resolution and Court Administration Services when that's the best service for their needs.

Centralized Duty Counsel Scheduling

Schedules for duty counsel lawyers working across Alberta are now available in one easy-to-access platform that is available online and through a mobile app. With central scheduling, Legal Aid Alberta staff can enter duty counsel shifts for all courtrooms in Alberta and lawyers can access the system to enter availability or to make instant changes.

Lawyer Panels

To better provide Albertans with the quality legal representation they need, Legal Aid Alberta has established five lawyer panels – groups of staff and roster lawyers who dedicate themselves to a deep understanding of the laws and court practices in specific areas of law. This ensures disadvantaged Albertans are represented by lawyers with in-depth training and experience in child welfare, child representation, youth criminal law and more.

Phone System Upgrade

Legal Aid Alberta has implemented a new, state-of-the-art phone system in our Contact Centre and in offices across the province. The improvements mean we're avoiding phone system shutdowns and reducing the number of dropped calls.

Knowledge and Resource Library

In 2021, LAA launched a program to improve client service by developing a new library of information that helps Contact Centre intake officers quickly find clear and concise information to assist applicants and clients. The Knowledge and Resource Library has increased efficiency through rapid access to accurate information, meaning better service for more clients.

PROTECTING ALBERTANS

Legal Aid Alberta improves the lives of all Albertans by providing strong legal representation to all Albertans, including the most disadvantaged among us. By focusing on duty counsel, immigration, child welfare, domestic violence, child representation, high-conflict clients, and adult and youth criminal matters, we are fulfilling a critical function and supporting fairness in the judicial system.

It is important to note that Legal Aid Alberta experienced unique organizational challenges in 2022-23 that temporarily affected operations and influenced some reported metrics. Notably, a six-month labour disruption by roster lawyers had some minimal repercussions on lawyer appointing times. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice announced a 33 per cent increase to the tariff rate paid to roster lawyers, resulting in a corresponding rise in average roster certificate costs for some legal issues.

EMERGENCY PROTECTION ORDERS

Family violence is a tragic reality for many Albertans. Our Emergency Protection Order (EPO) program helps victims of family violence protect themselves against abusers. In recent years our EPO lawyers have responded to increasing demand. LAA EPO duty counsel lawyers help claimants better understand their legal rights through the process of obtaining and confirming EPOs. Through the program, claimants are provided with information about the court system and their options, referrals to other support organizations, and a lawyer to appear in court to get the EPO. This service provides immediate protection from family violence and is a critical tool to keep Albertans safe. There is no cost to access this service and there are no financial eligibility requirements – it is available to all Albertans.

KING'S BENCH EPO FILES OPENED



JUSTICE OF THE PEACE BAIL

Many Albertans are at a disadvantage if they are arrested. LAA's Justice of the Peace (JP) bail duty counsel lawyers are available from 8 a.m. to midnight, 365 days per year, to inform, advise, and represent arrested people in bail hearings, all by telephone and online platforms and at no cost. Launched in mid-2018, LAA's JP bail duty counsel section works collaboratively with the courts and Alberta Justice to make prompt and effective access to justice a reality for all Albertans, from their first point of contact with the justice system. Since the LAA bail program's inception in 2018, it has handled approximately 150,000 hearings.

JP BAIL HEARINGS



DUTY COUNSEL

Duty counsel is an integral part of our justice system and helps courts proceed as efficiently as possible. Duty counsel lawyers provide immediate legal information, advice and assistance in courtrooms across the province to people who attend court without a lawyer. Often, they speak on an individual's behalf in court. Their work focuses on helping unrepresented individuals navigate the court process and ensures that all Albertans understand their rights and can exercise them meaningfully. This service is free and available to all Albertans appearing in court – regardless of their income. LAA assigns duty counsel in docket courts in all Alberta criminal courts (adult and youth), and at institutional hearings, applications for confirmation of Emergency Protection Orders, mental health review panels, and therapeutic courts. Additionally, LAA provides duty counsel services for family matters being heard in the Alberta Court of Justice and Court of King's Bench.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES				AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST			
CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
DUTY COUNSEL (Scheduled Dates)	10,240	15,218	16,496	DUTY COUNSEL	\$636	\$697	\$866

CRIMINAL ADULT

Access to justice is crucial to a fair and free democracy. In Alberta's justice system, meaningful access to justice usually requires a lawyer who understands and has experience in the area of law at hand. An unfortunate reality is that many people charged with criminal offences cannot privately retain counsel to defend themselves. A significant part of the work LAA does is related to adult criminal matters. Our lawyers, both staff and roster, work to provide access to justice to Albertans facing the very serious consequences of imprisonment, loss of livelihood, or removal from Canada. A big part of that work is to ensure that clients' rights are respected, and that the justice system is running fairly and in accordance with its own rules and defining principles. When Albertans are in the frightening and vulnerable situation of facing criminal allegations, LAA's role is to give them the information, advice and representation they need.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES				AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST			
CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	LEVEL OF CERTIFICATE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
LEVEL 1	13,444	16,019	19,599	LEVEL 1	\$1,074	\$1,050	\$1,033
LEVEL 2/2.5	6,741	7,783	8,124	LEVEL 2/2.5	\$2,354	\$2,340	\$2,261
LEVEL 3	216	238	214	LEVEL 3	\$17,834	\$18,846	\$17,865
OTHER	422	474	465	OTHER	\$723	\$667	\$722

CRIMINAL YOUTH

The Youth Criminal Justice Act sets out Canada's policy for youth criminal justice. This includes recognition that young people have diminished moral blameworthiness and the right to enhanced procedural protection in a system separate from the adult criminal system. The Act also enshrines the right of all persons aged between 12 and 17 years charged with a criminal offence to have representation by a legal aid lawyer. Recognizing that non-legal life issues are often part of what leads young people to be charged with offences, LAA also helps guide youth clients to supports that can help them identify and deal with such issues, which can often help improve outcomes in court.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES				AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST			
CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	LEVEL OF CERTIFICATE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
LEVEL 1	1,028	1,011	1,295	LEVEL 1	\$817	\$800	\$762
LEVEL 2/2.5	600	716	863	LEVEL 2/2.5	\$1,772	\$1,943	\$1,877
LEVEL 3	4	6	15	LEVEL 3	\$24,092	\$23,538	\$13,159
OTHER	6	4	3	OTHER	\$693	\$422	\$670

FAMILY AND CIVIL, AND CHILD WELFARE

LAA helps Albertans dealing with family law and child welfare matters by advising and guiding them through the legal system and representing them in court actions. LAA helps eligible Albertans with client protection, child welfare, representation of children, custody, access and parenting orders, and child and spousal support. When a vulnerable Albertan is involved with legal issues due to family breakdown, LAA can often help protect and exercise that person's rights. LAA's role is to help disadvantaged and vulnerable Albertans with legal issues, which includes limited matters related to civil law. In Alberta, a disabled or incapacitated adult can have another adult appointed as his or her guardian or trustee, to help the person with essential life decisions and functions. If a person is subject to an order like this and disagrees with the terms, LAA can help them through the court process, to ensure it proceeds fairly and equitably.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES				AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST			
CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
CHILD WELFARE	1,487	1,355	1,386	CHILD WELFARE	\$3,346	\$3,343	\$2,991
FAMILY AND CIVIL	3,006	4,065	3,729	FAMILY AND CIVIL	\$3,902	\$3,378	\$2,869

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE

Support for immigrants and refugees is an important part of the work LAA does to support the most vulnerable. Many of Alberta's residents came here from other countries, often to improve their lives, better provide for their families, or seek refuge from violence and persecution. Immigrants who are physically resident in Alberta sometimes require assistance with immigration issues or refugee claims. To help ensure that these legal processes unfold fairly and according to law, LAA helps newcomers and non-citizens with legal actions such as refugee claims, judicial reviews of refugee claims, detention reviews and appeals, among others.

ISSUED CERTIFICATES				AVERAGE ROSTER CERTIFICATE COST			
CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	CERTIFICATE TYPE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE	328	321	523	IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE	\$1,675	\$1,508	\$738

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Legal Aid Alberta is a leader in providing training opportunities to lawyers across the province – and educating the public about LAA services and the justice system.

2022-23 OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS:

- More than 1,600 Alberta lawyers registered for 18 professional development and training sessions prepared and hosted by LAA staff lawyers.
- Registrations reached 200 for a public webinar on how LAA protects families and individuals from domestic violence.
- Hundreds of Alberta high school students learned about the vital role of duty counsel as part of LAA's Duty Counsel Day outreach.
- Millions of Albertans gained a better understanding of how LAA serves them and how our justice system works through news media coverage.

Legal training sessions for lawyers ranged from pragmatic how-to training on client management strategies, billing, and using a new LAA scheduling platform for duty counsel, to more technical training sessions on legal matters, including child welfare law, restorative justice, and immigration detention cases.

More than 150 LAA staff lawyers attended 10 internal professional development events, delivered by senior counsel.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM LAWYERS AND THE PUBLIC

Lawyers attending professional development training sessions developed and delivered by LAA staff lawyers ranked the calibre of these sessions highly:

- 98 per cent of attendees completing a post-webinar survey rated their sessions as "excellent" or "good"
- 99 per cent indicated interest in attending more LAA sessions



This was a wonderful session, particularly because training on this topic is impossible to find, this is the only session (on this topic) that I have seen offered anywhere since I started practicing seven years ago! Please make this an annual conference!



There was no presentation I attended or watched on-demand that didn't educate me and improve my knowledge and skills to provide services effectively. Thank you.



I was unaware of the EPOP program, I have had calls regarding family EPOs now I know where to send those telephone call queries.



LAA STORIES

From the Contact Centre to the courthouse and all points between, Legal Aid Alberta team members are driven to advocate for the legal rights of disadvantaged people.

Our people are exceptional. They go the extra mile, united in our mission to resolve legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and protect the Rule of Law for the benefit of everyone.

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS AND SETTING PRECEDENTS

LAA lawyers "swing for the fences" advocating for clients



He had spent a non-trivial amount of time in confinement because of his conditions – for things he has no control over.

A youth diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder who has trouble focusing and connecting actions to consequences pleaded guilty to a variety of criminal charges – mostly property-related offences.

The Crown prosecutor and a Legal Aid Alberta staff lawyer made a joint submission to the court asking for a four-month deferred custody sentencing order, which the judge delivered.

But it soon became apparent that, due to his mental health issues, the youth was unable to meet the conditions of his sentence. He was repeatedly arrested and held for breaching the conditions of his sentence. He was picked up five times: four for missing curfew and once for failing to meet with his probation officer.

Due to COVID-19 protocols the youth was held in quarantine – the equivalent to solitary confinement – each time he was taken into custody. The youth spent a total of 51 days in solitary confinement while in custody on breaches of his sentence.

"He was in breach five times and every time he's brought in, he's put in quarantine. That's the same as solitary confinement and for someone with his medical conditions, that's torturous," said LAA staff lawyer Susan Haas, who represented the youth.

Haas, a member of the LAA Criminal Trial Group, decided it was "time to swing for the fences" and ask the sentencing judge to simply terminate the youth's sentence.

There was no published precedent on cases like this one. Haas carefully crafted her case but wasn't sure what the outcome would be.

"I wasn't sure if I was going to go in and be told this is a ridiculous thing to ask for – the usual thing is to amend conditions, not ask: 'How about we just stop the sentence today?' But when I looked at the section (Section 59 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act) it doesn't say you can't ask that. So, I did," she said.

"To me, Parliament's intent seemed clear – that these sentences should be reviewable under Section 59."

The judge agreed and terminated the sentence, but the Crown appealed the ruling.

In the end, the Alberta Court of King's Bench ruled that the review was permitted.

Haas says it is because lawyers in the Criminal Trial Group are able to focus on such cases and deeply explore all their options for a client that she was able to ensure fair treatment for the youth.

The ruling will help others in the future. It gives lawyers another tool they can use to protect their clients and provides the court with confidence in varying deferred custody sentences for youths.

LAWYER PANELS

Establishing and supporting teams of staff and roster lawyers to focus on specific areas of law results in higher quality representation for Albertans



Lawyer panels help us make sure that we connect the right people with the right work in situations where a very particular skill set is required.

A child caught in the middle of a high-conflict parental dispute. A young person charged with a serious crime. A sexual assault complainant facing the prospect of testifying at trial. When some of Alberta's most marginalized citizens need help, the courts often rely on Legal Aid Alberta to provide Albertans with counsel who have highly specific legal training and experience.

To better connect Albertans with the expertise they need, Legal Aid Alberta has established lawyer panels – groups of staff and roster lawyers who dedicate themselves to a deep understanding of the laws and court practices in specific areas of law.

Matters not handled by staff lawyers can be forwarded to a roster lawyer on the panel who has substantial experience representing clients in these highly complex areas and who has participated in extensive training.

"Lawyer panels help us make sure that we connect the right people with the right work in situations where a very particular skill set is required," says Andrea Doyle, Senior Advisory Counsel with Legal Aid Alberta.

"Members of the child representation panel, for example, will typically have thorough training in mediation and negotiation and multiple years' experience in interviewing and working with – and the legal representation of – children."

LAA has created legal panels that concentrate on advocating for:

- Young people facing criminal charges.
- Children in high-conflict parenting matters.
- Parents and guardians in child welfare cases.
- Complainants and witnesses who have the right to respond to applications in criminal prosecutions. "This usually involves sexual offence trials in which the complainant's medical or sexual history comes into question."
- Individuals accused of major crimes.

Ongoing professional development and mentorships are also a central pillar of the lawyer panels.

Disadvantaged Albertans in every corner of the province stand to benefit from the lawyer panel model. Panels provide LAA with another tool to identify and deploy knowledgeable legal counsel in all areas of the province. Membership on the panels is by application and the panels represent a cross-section of the legal profession throughout Alberta.

Doyle says the courts have been overwhelmingly pleased with the panels recognizing the value of a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of a situation in helping to resolve difficult and complex matters.

"This is an innovation that highlights the high quality of our staff and roster lawyers and speaks to Legal Aid Alberta's role in providing high quality legal representation across the province."



CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION

Law students gain valuable experience and learn at the side of skilled lawyers



There's an immeasurable number of things that I learned through the program.

Today's law students are tomorrow's legal leaders. LAA is committed to helping the next generation of lawyers develop the tools they need to have an impact on the lives of their clients and support a fair and effective justice system.

We seek out high-achieving students who are eager to work closely with disadvantaged people, have excellent communication skills, especially in tough situations, thrive in fast-paced work environments and are always up for a challenge.

Casey Caines (pictured above, left) joined Legal Aid Alberta after completing her second year of law at the University of Alberta as part of the student placement program in the Low Income and the Law course. Caines found herself a step closer to understanding where she fits within the legal system – particularly where she can do work that is meaningful and connected to the community.

"I am really interested in how the law can address systemic inequalities and access to justice," says Caines.

She gained insight on practical applications of the law, from basic court etiquette to using trauma-informed approaches to client service.

"There's an immeasurable number of things that I learned through the program."

Tayla Basawa (pictured above, right), who completed LAA's four-month Indigenous Summer Students Program, says she's grateful for the experiences she had, including sitting in on a sexual assault trial with LAA staff lawyer Sarah Dover.

"Seeing her in action and witnessing the connection with her clients, I felt that I was part of the process and played an integral role in this case."

LAA mentors "were willing to answer questions, gave meaningful feedback and practical advice about my legal career, articling and law school," said Basawa.



CRIMINAL TRIAL GROUP FOCUSES ON COMPLEX CLIENT CASES

Everyone has the right to a fair trial and legal counsel no matter how difficult their personal circumstances may be



It's not always the complexity of the legal matter itself that is challenging...the legal and personal issues kind of go hand in hand.

A team of Legal Aid Alberta staff lawyers is stepping up to resolve criminal matters for complex clients whose cases are challenging beyond the norm.

The Criminal Trial Group (CTG) defends youth and adults who have changed lawyers multiple times and may be facing extraordinarily challenging personal issues such as mental health, addiction, and housing.

"It's not always the complexity of the legal matter itself that is challenging – sometimes it's the client whose personal circumstances are complex. And the legal and personal issues kind of go hand in hand," said Sarah Lanceley, an LAA staff lawyer and one of LAA's CTG leaders.

The CTG is focusing on challenging clients who demand more time and resources from the courts and their lawyers. In addition

to facing criminal charges, these clients have the disadvantage of having a string of failed interactions with lawyers. This is where the CTG comes in.

CTG team members "are putting in more time and making substantial effort" to make sure clients' matters are resolved.

In our democratic society, everyone has the right to a fair trial and legal counsel no matter how difficult their personal circumstances may be. Without the CTG more of these cases would drag on, clogging the courts.

It's "a lot of work to maintain that client confidence and make sure the case is eventually concluded," Lanceley said.

A woman wearing a patterned hijab is seated at a desk in an office environment. She is looking down at a document or device on the desk. The background shows office shelves and a window. A large, stylized red and grey graphic element is on the left side of the page.

ON THE FRONT LINES

Legal Aid Alberta is a constant, stable and trusted presence in Alberta's justice system, guiding Albertans through challenging legal situations and life circumstances.

DUTY COUNSEL: YOUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Regardless of your income, LAA duty counsel are on the spot in provincial docket courts in Alberta to help you make informed decisions



There are a number of myths out there about legal rights ... it's important for people to have an opportunity to speak with someone knowledgeable regarding legal information and court processes.

Legal trouble doesn't discriminate. Anyone can suddenly find themselves in a courtroom wondering what to say or do next. Without understanding the law and court procedures, you're at a definite disadvantage.

That's where lawyers called duty counsel enter the picture. Duty counsel deliver on-the-spot information and legal advice – free of charge. They give you clarity, so you can make informed decisions about your next steps.

Legal Aid Alberta duty counsel represent Albertans all across the province – from big cities to small towns.

LAA staff duty counsel like Sara Peacock and Bobbi Jo Hennigar serve on the front lines of the justice system.

In the Edmonton courthouse, Peacock focuses on child welfare and family law.

As Legal Aid Alberta's staff duty counsel in Fort McMurray, Hennigar is responsible for providing legal support for adult and youth criminal matters, as well as in Drug Treatment Court.

Hennigar is also LAA's duty counsel in the community of Fort Chipewyan, home of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, located 300 kilometres north of Fort McMurray.

The remote, largely Indigenous community of 800 is accessible via a 45-minute flight from Fort McMurray or, during the winter, an hours-long drive that includes crossing an ice highway across a frozen lake. Once a month, Hennigar joins a judge, prosecutor and court clerks to travel to the remote community and hold court.

"Duty counsel, especially in remote and rural areas, can be the only point of access a person has to legal aid," says Hennigar. "I can help people who have no other way to access the justice system."

Hennigar uses LAA's new Client Gateway service to help people apply for support from LAA without having to call. The Gateway

enables people who have no access to phones to connect with LAA by providing their information to duty counsel or community agencies whose mandates include access to justice. Their information is fed directly to LAA's Contact Centre team so the application can be processed as usual.

"Before we had the Gateway, I'd sit on hold with people who didn't have a phone until they could get through. The Gateway makes it easier, and that is one less person calling into the main number."

Back at the Edmonton courthouse, Peacock takes on duty counsel service in the child welfare docket court four mornings per week, and in family court three afternoons a week.

"Docket court isn't a hearing; there isn't a trial. The judge can't make a major decision. There's limited time for any particular matter, so we have to explain what will happen to the individuals and move them into the next step of the process."

Peacock says part of her responsibility is educating people about the law.

"The court system is intimidating and complex and involves a set of rules that are different from day-to-day living," she explains.

"There are a number of myths out there about legal rights and entitlements, particularly about family law. It's important for people to have an opportunity to speak with someone knowledgeable regarding legal information and court processes."

Duty counsel work is fast-paced and allows her to assist a large number of people who are dealing with an often-confusing system.

"It's always interesting, and it's always an adventure," she says. "You meet all kinds of different people. It's challenging in many ways, but it's also an area where we can provide the most assistance to people coming into the court system."



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CONTACT CENTRE INTAKE OFFICER

Contact Centre team members are on the front lines of the justice system



You have to approach people with empathy, you have to be understanding regardless of their circumstances, and without judgment.

It's 8 a.m. on a Thursday morning. Susan Roth, Contact Centre Intake Officer (CCIO) at Legal Aid Alberta is beginning her shift for the day at LAA's Contact Centre. Just minutes after clocking in, she answers a call from an individual who's being held in custody at a remand centre.

Like all clients, there's a sense of stress and urgency to resolve their matters as quickly as possible. But with Roth's empathetic approach and communication style, her callers are able to articulate their needs clearly and more efficiently.

"People are in some form of a crisis," says Roth. "You have to approach people with empathy, you have to be understanding regardless of their circumstances, and without judgment."

Roth wraps up her first call of the day but her work on the file continues. She is meticulous in her notes, logging the details of her client's information in LAA's database.

When the second call comes in, she repeats this process all over again.

LAA has a complement of about 60 full- and part-time CCIOs. With phone lines open from 8:15 a.m. until 4:15 p.m. Monday to Friday, the Contact Centre receives up to 1,000 phone calls per day, sometimes more.

Senior Manager of Client Assessment Services Melody Schram says CCIOs need to put in equal degrees of empathy and control to get key information and effectively manage calls.

Callers can be distraught. Some may be in jail, facing serious criminal charges. Others may be parents whose children have been taken into the custody of child welfare authorities. CCIOs could even take calls from people as young as 12, calling about criminal charges they're facing under the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

CCIOs also need a strong knowledge of the court system and LAA's own internal client systems and technology – all while balancing other administrative work such as following through on calls to ensure applications are assessed and that those who qualify for services are appointed a lawyer.

On the front lines, our CCIOs are kept busy, and find satisfaction in knowing they are helping people access the justice system.

"As an intake officer," says Roth, "it is rewarding to know that I've played a role in helping clients on their journey towards resolving their legal issues"

CLIENT GATEWAY: IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Eliminating barriers and building new pathways to justice

Many Albertans find it challenging to call Legal Aid Alberta for help. Reasons vary from not having access to a phone, limited time to remain on hold, or mental illness.

LAA has created a way to help disadvantaged Albertans connect with us and apply for support.

The new LAA Client Gateway is a secure online form that lawyers and community partners whose mandates include access to justice can use to help existing LAA clients apply for additional legal aid coverage.

For roster lawyers with existing clients facing criminal charges, this means no more delays getting new charges covered and no more wondering if their client has been able to call us. Clients don't have to tell their story to multiple people.

For duty counsel and LAA's JP Bail lawyers, this means they can help existing LAA clients on the spot, in just a few minutes, by filling out an online form to help them apply for additional coverage.

The service is also used by Student Legal Services (SLS) in Edmonton, enabling SLS to collect a person's information and forward it to LAA via the Client Gateway.

Information submitted through the Client Gateway is directed to our Contact Centre staff for processing.

The program began operating in May 2022 and has helped thousands of people apply without having to contact LAA directly.

TACKLING THE CYCLE OF ADDICTION AND CRIME

Legal Aid Alberta is playing an important role in Alberta's therapeutic courts, supporting fairness in the criminal justice system



Drug treatment court was about accountability...learning to love myself, forgiving my past.

Drug treatment courts across Alberta are literally saving lives, according to the LAA staff duty counsel lawyers who represent their clients through the therapeutic court – and to the clients themselves.

"I was entrenched in a cycle of drugs and crime led by my substance abuse disorder," said Alana Lambert, a graduate of Edmonton's Drug Treatment Court. When she first attended the court, she recalls, "I didn't have a lot of life left in me – they didn't know from one week to the next if I'd be dead or alive."

Drug treatment courts have been operating in Edmonton and Calgary since 2005 and 2007 respectively and are now also operating in Lethbridge and Fort McMurray. Legal Aid Alberta staff lawyers play a key role, representing individuals accepted into the programs.

Participants are bound to an exhaustive list of rules, from frequent drug testing and curfew checks to reporting to probation officers, completing community service volunteer work, and attending detoxification and addictions treatment.

"Drug treatment court was about accountability, about learning about my behaviours, learning new tools to deal with that behaviour, being accountable to myself, recognizing my thought patterns, learning to love myself, forgiving my past," says Lambert.

In most cases, the program is working. Few participants ever return to court. Lambert is a good example. She is working as a peer mentor with the John Howard Society and a peer support worker with Alberta Health Services. She recently graduated from NorQuest College's social work program and has applied to enter the University of Calgary's Bachelor of Social Work degree program.



PROTECTING ALBERTA FAMILIES

LAA lawyers provide legal protection for victims of domestic violence in all its forms



There are times when we see parents in their 70s or 80s applying for an emergency protection order against their adult child, who is demanding or stealing money and/or assuming control over their parents' bank accounts and possessions.

Family violence is an unfortunate reality for many Albertans – and it happens every day. Awareness of what constitutes abuse is an important part of keeping victims and loved ones safe.

But the telltale signs are not always clear, and violence is not always categorized as physical, says Legal Aid Alberta Family Lawyer Scott Thurmeier.

"The first thing people think of when you talk about family violence is physical violence – that people are being harmed physically. It's relatively common that we see, in addition to physical violence, coercive and controlling behaviour."

LAA staff lawyers working within the Emergency Protection Order Program reported 2,134 opened files in 2022-23 – an increase of 10 per cent over the last five years.

Thurmeier, who often helps individuals seeking these protection orders, says he sees everything from financial abuse to physical and sexual threats to coercive control in the spectrum of family violence.

"Common situations we see is one person limiting someone's access to finances by taking away their bank card, not allowing them to share a bank account, giving them a very minimal allowance for things like groceries, limiting access to a family vehicle or never having enough gas in the car to allow someone to get very far from home, and more."

When it comes to family violence, Thurmeier also says that many of the financial abuse situations he sees involve elderly parents and their child.

"There are times when we see parents in their 70s or 80s applying for an emergency protection order against their adult child, who is demanding or stealing money and/or assuming control over their parents' bank accounts and possessions," he said.

"Elderly people are more susceptible to [financial abuse] and just based on demographics, as the population ages, we unfortunately could be seeing more cases come up."

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

LAA duty counsel help guide clients to more positive outcomes



The number of Indigenous people who are incarcerated increases year after year, and we are interested in being part of the solution.

Legal Aid Alberta lawyers are playing an important role representing clients in the newly established Edmonton Indigenous Court.

Indigenous courts focus on healing individuals impacted by the trauma of colonization practices like residential schools, the 60s Scoop and the Millennial Scoop, and to address the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

Changes made to the Criminal Code of Canada in 1996 to reduce the number of Indigenous people sentenced to prison "haven't had the desired effect," said LAA senior lawyer and Legal Services Manager Tania Sarkar.

LAA staff lawyer Shalayn Martel, who is a member of the Waterhen Lake First Nation in east-central Saskatchewan, provides duty counsel services at the Edmonton Indigenous Court. She says the court recognizes that Indigenous people face systemic challenges, including poverty. The inability to produce a large sum of money to cover bail shouldn't prevent anyone from being released from custody, and courts are looking closely at release plans that could include a variety

of supports such as treatment for addictions, housing, and assistance finding employment.

Unlike typical adversarial criminal courts, the Edmonton Indigenous Court has co-operation and collaboration built into its process. Indigenous culture is woven into the court and ceremonies such as smudging are conducted before proceedings begin.

Every week, defence lawyers like Martel join prosecutors, Native Counselling Services and other support organizations to review and discuss cases and outcomes. By coming up with solutions ahead of time, they ultimately operate in a more collaborative courtroom.

The approach is making a difference.

"People come before the criminal justice system because they are broken," said Sarkar. "They are lacking supports to address addictions and mental health issues. And getting some of those things addressed before sentencing is helpful. If we can put those things before the court we can see if it makes a difference in sentencing."



SUPPORT FOR CLIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WHO FACE CRIMINAL CHARGES

Collaborative approach between judges, LAA staff duty counsel, prosecutors, and medical and social service professionals adds up to life-changing outcomes



We still apply all the principles of law, but we do it with better information that is suited to a person with mental health issues.

A one-of-a-kind court in Alberta is taking a collaborative approach to resolving criminal matters faced by people who have been diagnosed with mental illness.

Unlike other docket courts, the Alberta Court of Justice's Mental Health Court in Edmonton has resources in the courtroom to help people charged with a criminal offence by addressing their underlying mental health issues as well as their legal matters.

The court has dedicated judges, prosecutors, and Legal Aid Alberta staff duty counsel working side-by-side in the courtroom with nurses, social workers, a psychiatrist and an LAA justice navigator who helps connect clients with social support.

"A client's legal matters are addressed with information that is better suited to their individual situation because we have access to social worker and Alberta Health Services files," said Andrew Holko, an LAA staff duty counsel who represents clients in the Mental Health Court. "When a person is released on bail, they have a place to go, and supports are in place. We still apply all the principles of law, but we do it with better information that is suited to a person with mental health issues."

Once clients are managing their illness with medical professionals and bringing more stability to their lives, they are better able to deal with criminal matters they are facing. The "turnstile" effect of people repeatedly returning to court on new charges because their underlying health issues have gone untreated is also stopped.

For Holko and others working in Mental Health Court, it is rewarding to see the positive impact.

"We see the value of treatment, we see how a person is reacting after having treatment at hospital," he said.

"For me, there are feel-good stories every day, and they come so often that you expect it to be part of your work."

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

**Financial statements
March 31, 2023**



Independent auditor's report

To the Board of Directors of
The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of **The Legal Aid Society of Alberta** [the "Society"], which comprise the statement of financial position as at March 31, 2023, and statement of changes in net assets (liabilities), statement of revenue and expenses and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Society as at March 31, 2023, and its results of operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements* section of our report. We are independent of the Society in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in Canada, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Other information

Management is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Annual Report, but does not include the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information, and in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

We obtained the Annual Report prior to the date of this auditor's report. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact in this auditor's report. We have nothing to report in this regard.

Responsibilities of management and those charged with governance for the financial statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Society's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Society or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.



Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Society's financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Society's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Society's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Society to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Edmonton, Canada
June 27, 2023

Ernst & Young LLP

Chartered Professional Accountants



The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of financial position

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

As at March 31

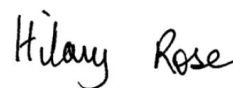
	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Assets		
Current		
Cash and restricted cash <i>[note 3]</i>	64,443	44,071
Accounts receivable	—	152
Goods and Services Tax receivable	683	490
Prepaid expenses	272	247
Total current assets	65,398	44,960
Capital assets, net <i>[note 4]</i>	2,043	2,213
	67,441	47,173
Liabilities		
Current		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities <i>[note 8]</i>	5,177	3,333
Accrued vacation pay	2,140	1,931
Current portion of deferred lease liability	273	273
Deferred revenue <i>[note 5]</i>	37,711	17,151
Provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates <i>[note 6]</i>	9,973	12,154
Total current liabilities	55,274	34,842
Deferred contributions <i>[note 7]</i>	8,500	8,500
Deferred lease liability	1,779	1,943
Total liabilities	65,553	45,285
Net assets (liabilities)		
Internally funded capital assets	2,043	2,213
Unrestricted	(155)	(325)
Total net assets	1,888	1,888
	67,441	47,173

See accompanying notes

On behalf of the Board of Directors:



Ryan Callioux
Chair, Board of Directors
Legal Aid Alberta



Hilary Rose
Director, Board of Directors
Legal Aid Alberta

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of changes in net assets (liabilities)

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2023		
	Internally funded capital assets	Unrestricted	Total
	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of year	2,213	(325)	1,888
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	—	—
Purchases of capital assets	704	(704)	—
Amortization of capital assets	(874)	874	—
Balance, end of year	2,043	(155)	1,888

	2022		
	Internally funded capital assets	Unrestricted	Total
	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of year	3,068	(1,180)	1,888
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	—	—
Purchases of capital assets	199	(199)	—
Amortization of capital assets	(1,054)	1,054	—
Balance, end of year	2,213	(325)	1,888

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of revenue and expenses

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Revenue		
Province of Alberta	89,545	82,320
Alberta Law Foundation grant – statutory	2,729	1,732
Alberta Law Foundation grant – special	—	3,700
Recoveries from clients	4,923	5,018
Interest and other	2,891	876
Total revenue	100,088	93,646
Expenses		
Roster		
Legal aid fees and disbursements		
Criminal adult	39,189	34,564
Family and civil	8,299	8,861
Duty counsel	5,177	3,662
Child welfare	2,406	2,625
Criminal youth	1,651	1,454
Immigration and refugee	184	137
	56,906	51,303
Increase (decrease) in provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates [note 6]	(2,181)	1,058
	54,725	52,361
Other program expenses [notes 9 and 13]		
Legal representation – staff lawyers	29,851	28,316
Client services – intake and assessment	8,618	7,272
Management, general, and administration	6,894	5,697
	45,363	41,285
Total expenses	100,088	93,646
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	—

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Statement of cash flows

[expressed in thousands of dollars]

Year ended March 31

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Operating activities		
Excess of revenue over expenses	—	—
Add (deduct) items not involving cash		
Amortization of capital assets	874	1,054
Amortization of deferred lease liability	(164)	61
Provision for unbilled services	(2,181)	1,058
Changes in non-cash operating working capital related to operations		
Accounts receivable	152	(138)
Goods and Services Tax receivable	(193)	250
Prepaid expenses	(25)	(123)
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	1,844	(1,036)
Accrued vacation pay	209	214
Deferred revenue	20,560	(7,174)
Cash provided by (used in) operating activities	21,076	(5,834)
Investing activities		
Purchases of capital assets	(704)	(199)
Cash used in investing activities	(704)	(199)
Financing activities		
Contribution received for deferred lease inducements	—	—
Cash provided by financing activities	—	—
Net increase (decrease) in cash during the year	20,372	(6,033)
Cash and restricted cash, beginning of year	44,071	50,104
Cash and restricted cash, end of year	64,443	44,071

See accompanying notes

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

1. The organization

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta [the "Society"], registered as a society under the laws of the Province of Alberta, operates by agreement between the Society, the Law Society of Alberta and the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General of the Province of Alberta to assist individuals of modest means in obtaining legal services in criminal and civil matters. The current governance agreement became effective April 1, 2019 and expires on March 31, 2024. Under the provisions of the *Income Tax Act* (Canada), the Society is exempt from income tax.

2. Summary of significant accounting policies

These financial statements are prepared in accordance with Part III of the *CPA Canada Handbook – Accounting*, which constitutes generally accepted accounting principles for not-for-profit organizations in Canada and includes the significant accounting policies described hereafter.

Revenue recognition

The Society's primary sources of funding are contributions from the Province of Alberta, a statutory contribution from the Alberta Law Foundation, per the *Legal Profession Act*, of 25% of the interest it receives on lawyers' pooled trust accounts, and special contributions as agreed from time to time, recoveries from clients, and interest and other income.

The Society follows the deferral method of accounting for contributions. Contributions are recognized in the accounts when received or receivable if the amount to be received can be reasonably estimated and collection is reasonably assured. Unrestricted contributions are recognized as revenue when initially recorded in the accounts. Externally restricted contributions are deferred when initially recorded in the accounts and recognized as revenue in the year in which the related expenses are recognized.

Externally restricted contributions for the acquisition of capital assets are recorded as deferred capital contributions and recognized as revenue as the related assets are amortized over their useful lives. Restricted contributions for the purchase of capital assets that will not be amortized are recognized as a direct increase in net assets.

Recoveries from client recipients of legal aid services cannot be reasonably estimated in advance due to the uncertainty of collection. Accordingly, these recoveries and contributions are recorded as revenue when received.

Interest and other income are recognized as revenue when earned.

Expense recognition

Legal aid fees and disbursements are eligible for payment in respect of services authorized on issued legal aid certificates. The Society records the estimated value of services provided, but not submitted for payment, on outstanding certificates in the period in which the services are provided. Legal expenses include amounts billed to the Society by lawyers and an estimate of amounts for work performed but not yet billed.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

Allocation of other program expenses

The expenses of each function include personnel and other expenses that are directly related to the function. General support and other expenses are not allocated, except for occupancy, and information technology and business solutions, which are allocated to functions by head count.

Financial instruments

Financial instruments, including accounts receivable, Goods and Services Tax receivable, accounts payable and accrued liabilities, and accrued vacation pay, are initially recorded at their fair value and are subsequently measured at amortized cost, net of any provisions for impairment.

Cash and restricted cash

Cash and restricted cash include cash and restricted cash related to deferred revenue and contributions.

Capital assets

Purchased tangible and intangible assets are recorded at acquisition cost. Contributed tangible and intangible capital costs are recorded at fair value at the date of the contribution. Amortization is determined using the straight-line method at the following annual rates over the estimated useful lives of the assets as follows:

Tangible assets

Furniture and equipment	Over 7 years
Computer hardware	Over 4 years
Leasehold improvements	Over the lesser of the lease term and 10 years

Intangible assets

Computer software	Over 4 years
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Deferred lease liability

Deferred lease liability represents leasehold improvement allowances paid or payable by landlords and periods of free rent or graduated rent increases as inducements to enter into a long-term lease. This liability is amortized on a straight-line basis over the remaining term of the lease and recorded as a reduction of rent expense.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

3. Cash and restricted cash

Restricted cash relates to deferred revenue [note 5] and deferred contributions [note 7].

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Cash	18,232	18,420
Restricted cash – deferred revenue [note 5]	37,711	17,151
Restricted cash – deferred contributions [note 7]	8,500	8,500
	64,443	44,071

4. Capital assets

Capital assets consist of the following:

	2023		2022	
	Cost \$	Accumulated amortization \$	Cost \$	Accumulated amortization \$
Tangible assets				
Furniture and equipment	481	279	457	192
Computer hardware	217	147	794	717
Leasehold improvements	3,895	2,295	3,278	1,685
	4,593	2,721	4,529	2,594
Intangible assets				
Computer software	5,636	5,465	5,895	5,617
	10,229	8,186	10,424	8,211
Net book value	2,043		2,213	

During the year, the Society removed the cost and accumulated amortization of fully amortized assets as follows: computer hardware \$640 [2022 – \$114], and computer software \$259 [2022 – \$40]. Included in leasehold improvements is construction in progress of \$642 [2022 - \$nil].

5. Deferred revenue

Services to be delivered to clients were less than anticipated. As a result \$37,711 [2022 – \$17,151] of the funding from the Province of Alberta has been deferred and a corresponding amount of cash has been classified as restricted cash – deferred revenue for this purpose. This will be recognized as the expenses are incurred.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

6. Provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates

The provision for services provided by roster that have not been billed on outstanding certificates is estimated at year-end using a method that incorporates historical average costs and time frames to complete similar cases. The decrease for the year ended March 31, 2023, related to the change in provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates, was \$2,181 [2022 – decrease of \$1,058]. As at March 31, 2023, the Society had approximately 21,297 [2022 – 21,680] outstanding certificates issued to roster with an estimated liability of \$9,973 [2022 – \$12,154].

The estimated liability is subject to measurement uncertainty. Measurement uncertainty exists when there is a variance between the recognized amount and another reasonably possible amount. Due to the uncertainty involved in the estimation process, there will likely be a difference between the estimated and actual liability and the difference may be material.

In addition to the liability for unbilled services provided to March 31, 2023, on outstanding roster certificates, the Society estimates the future costs to complete roster and Society lawyer certificate files. As at March 31, 2023, there is an estimated \$19,378 [2022 – \$23,076] that will be incurred on approximately 22,852 [2022 – 23,225] outstanding certificates issued to roster and the Society's lawyers over and above both the billings paid to date and work performed but not yet billed. Due to the uncertainty in the estimation process, there will likely be a difference between the estimated and actual costs to complete outstanding certificates and the difference may be material.

During the year, there were increases to roster tariff rates in October 2022 and January 2023 which are applicable to certificates issued subsequent to those dates. The impact of the increases in tariff rates give rise to additional uncertainty in the estimates for the provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates and the estimates of future costs to complete roster and Society lawyer certificate files.

7. Deferred contributions

The current governance agreement ending March 31, 2024 requires that the Society defer and hold certain grant amounts received from the Alberta Law Foundation and the Province of Alberta, to a maximum amount agreed with the Province of Alberta [currently \$8.5 million], for non-forecasted or unbudgeted costs.

	2023		2022	
	Province of Alberta	Alberta Law Foundation	Total	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Balance, beginning of year	1,000	7,500	8,500	8,500
Amounts received during the year	—	—	—	—
Balance, end of year	1,000	7,500	8,500	8,500

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

8. Commitments and contingencies

[a] Commitments

The Society is committed under operating leases for office premises to make annual payments in the following amounts for the next five years and thereafter:

	\$
2024	2,232
2025	1,916
2026	1,725
2027	1,784
2028	1,833
Thereafter	10,417
	<u>19,907</u>

Included in the amounts are \$1,382 for 2024 related to lease payments for the soon to be vacated Edmonton Revillon office location. Since this location will no longer be in use, amounts after August 2023 have been recorded in accounts payable and accrued liabilities in the amount of \$752 [2022 – Calgary Dominion location \$354].

[b] Contingencies

During the ordinary course of business activities, the Society may be contingently liable for litigation and claims from clients, suppliers and former employees. Management believes that adequate provisions have been made in the accounts where required. Although it is not possible to estimate the extent of potential costs and losses, if any, management believes that the ultimate resolution of such contingencies will not have a material adverse effect on the financial position or results of operations of the Society.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

9. Other program expenses

Other program expenses reflected in the statement of revenue and expenses, classified by object, are as follows:

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Salaries and benefits	36,614	34,019
Amortization of capital assets	874	1,054
Occupancy	2,597	1,732
Outside services	1,176	2,080
Computer	2,333	944
Office operating and supplies	1,063	794
Travel	115	31
Legal disbursements	132	139
Communication	226	320
Goods and Services Tax not refundable	233	172
	45,363	41,285

Occupancy expense has been allocated to other program expenses as follows:

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Legal representation – staff lawyers	1,380	1,051
Client services – intake and assessment	700	376
Management, general and administration	517	305
	2,597	1,732

Information technology and business solution expenses has been allocated to other program expenses as follows:

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Legal representation – staff lawyers	3,785	3,309
Client services – intake and assessment	1,660	1,518
Management, general and administration	699	528
	6,144	5,355

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

10. Related parties

Certain members of the Board of Directors provide certificate services to the Society. These legal services are provided in the regular course of business under the same tariff of fees as other lawyers. During the year, directors provided certificate services of \$59 [2022 – \$44] to the Society and their respective firms provided additional certificate services of \$323 [2022 – \$365].

11. Trust accounts

As part of its normal professional practice, the Society administers trust money on behalf of its clients, that is maintained in separate trust accounts and deposits. The Society has no beneficial interest in these trust accounts and deposits, except to the extent that fees for services rendered and disbursements on behalf of the client may be paid therefrom. These amounts are not recorded in the financial statements of the Society. The balances of trust accounts and deposits as at March 31, 2023 amounted to \$215 [2022 – \$203].

12. Financial instruments and risk management

Credit risk

The Society's exposure to credit risk, represented by the carrying amount of accounts receivable, results from the risk that one party to the financial instrument may cause a financial loss for the other party by failing to discharge an obligation. The Society monitors outstanding balances regularly and allows for uncollectible amounts when determined.

Liquidity risk

The Society is exposed to the risk that it will encounter difficulty in meeting obligations associated with its financial liabilities. The Society is exposed to this risk mainly in respect of its accounts payable and accrued liabilities, accrued vacation pay, and provision for unbilled services provided on outstanding certificates.

The Legal Aid Society of Alberta

Notes to financial statements

[dollar amounts in thousands]

March 31, 2023

13. Comparative figures

Certain comparative figures have been reclassified to conform to the current year's presentation. During the year, the Society performed procedures to allocate information technology and business solutions expenses, that were previously included in management, general, and administration, to functions by head count. As a result, there were reclassifications to prior year figures as noted in the table below.

	2022 Balance as Reported	2022 Balance as Previously reported	Increase (decrease)
	\$	\$	\$
Other program expenses			
Legal representation – staff lawyers	28,316	25,007	3,309
Client services – intake and assessment	7,272	5,754	1,518
Management, general, and administration	5,697	10,524	(4,827)
Total	41,285	41,285	—