



## MESSAGE TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY

We are writing as the Board of Directors for the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC). Our Board consists of community leaders who have been working within and on behalf of the Black community for the majority of our careers. We live and understand the issues that affect African Canadians. It is our corporate, moral and professional responsibility to ensure that the ACLC works in the best interests of the Black community, but also that the standard of work and management remains of a high quality and is transparent and accountable. The quality of the Clinic's work has never been questioned. Neither this Board nor any of its previous iterations has ever received a complaint about the standard of the ACLC's services and advocacy on behalf of our community.

From courtrooms to classrooms, the ACLC is one of the Black community's strongest and most vocal champions. Its aim is to always consult with the community, and voice the community's concerns in provincial, national, and international forums. The powers that be don't like it when we force them to change.

The ACLC is a not-for-profit community agency established in 1994 to address systemic racism and racial discrimination. One of its core funders is Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Over the past 23 years, the Clinic has engaged in significant cases focusing on issues of concern to the Black community, including: racial profiling, carding, education, mandatory minimum sentences, child welfare, and other human rights violations. This work has a significant and positive impact for the Black community in Ontario and indeed Canada. The ACLC also engages in significant law reform and community development initiatives aimed at organizing and mobilizing the Black community in response to anti-Black racism.

As you are aware, a decision has been made by LAO and the ACLC does not agree with this decision. The Board carefully examined the decision against the Clinic, and we are writing this letter to unequivocally express our support for the ACLC's work and our trust in its leadership. The Board annually establishes measurable objectives for the Clinic and partners, and it has performed admirably in meeting both these expectations and LAO's requirements. As part of the Board's fiduciary responsibility and governance we undertake an annual audit. For over ten (10) years we used MNP a major national accounting firm. Since 2016, we retained the services of Hennick Herman and audit firm with expertise in the non-for-profit sector. Both firms have a sound reputation for conducting audits with a high level of scrutiny and due diligence.

The ACLC has been on the front line of racially relevant legal and social issues in Canada since its inception in 1994. Since 1997, the ACLC has served over 19,000 clients. This work is seldom easy, but it is essential. As an organization that has led the charge against anti-Black racism in

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Ontario, conflict and challenges are inherent to the Clinic's work. This has not always made the Clinic popular with its funders, in the media, and with key public institutions. Accordingly, it attracts a healthy dose of adulation, attention, criticism, and resentment. The purpose behind the ACLC's work has never been in doubt. Being entrusted to advocate on behalf of one's community is amongst the greatest honours one can receive, and this is not a responsibility that the Clinic takes lightly. Under its current leadership the Clinic has flourished and continues to be unflinching and relentless in its pursuit of equity and justice for all African Canadians.

The very nature of the Clinic's work has made the organization and its management a target. Change can cause discomfort. This is particularly true when the change itself concerns the issues of race and anti-Black racism. Because of this, the Clinic has, from its inception, been subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism by LAO and its detractors. **We are not writing to respond to innuendos or incomplete information as we have not yet concluded a legal procedure. Doing so would only add to the chaos that is currently being exhibited. We are writing this as a message to the African Canadian community, that the ACLC has spent decades fighting for. In light of the aforementioned allegations, we humbly ask that you stand behind the ACLC as it has so tenaciously stood for our people and our community.**

We understand that you do not have all of the facts pertaining to this matter. We hope that the Clinic's decades of tireless work has generated the good will and confidence to sustain your and the broader community's support and trust until the entirety of the facts can be brought to light.

Until then, we leave you with this: **The Clinic requested and was subjected to an independent audit.** This audit highlighted some deficiencies. We are not perfect, and the Board and management have worked tirelessly to implement all of the recommendations made by the auditors and LAO. We were asked to address specific issues and have successfully done so. The Clinic has implemented all of the recommendations. Having said this, the relationship with LAO is ongoing and we do not seek in any way to jeopardize it and the inherent accountability. We understand that you may be concerned. But, if you take an honest look at the ACLC and its work and leadership, we are confident that you will see an organization that has consistently defended and fought for Ontario's Black community against all odds.

In the drive towards a more just society, it is the ACLC's *results* aligned with corporate responsiveness that really matter and not the rumours intended to undermine its good work. It is the ACLC that fights for Black children, Black mothers, Black fathers, and all Black people. It is the ACLC that fights for Black teachers, Black students, Black workers, and Black inmates. It is the ACLC whose staff works every single day to restore dignity to Black bodies in the eyes of the law. When society shrugs our people aside, it is the Clinic that can and does fight for them. In the face of very significant resistance or disregard, it is the ACLC that fights for the Black community. It is the ACLC that fights for **you**.

Sincerely,

Rawle Elliott, Board Chair