

Q&A By John T. Syrtash, Associate, Garfin Zeidenberg LLP
Answers to pressing questions on Family Law.

Free lawyers are hard to find.

Question: A few months ago you listed a phone number for a referral service of lawyers that did divorce cases for free or very little. Can you please provide the phone number and/or website address?

Answer: Sad to say, no such service actually exists. I was misinformed. ProBono Law Ontario is not mandated to assist people looking for lawyers who work for free in the family law field. It appears the Committee created to design programs to facilitate probono legal work was convinced if it were to do so in family law, then the Government of Ontario would be less persuaded to adequately fund Ontario Legal Aid. I disagree. The problem with Legal Aid is it helps only the very poorest among us. It does not assist those who are not the very poorest, but earn just enough to scrape by with a lower level of income and certainly do not have enough to hire an experienced family law lawyer. In that regard, those responsible for developing programs to facilitate probono work at the Law Society of Upper Canada have failed those of our residents, such as single working parents, who badly need legal representation in the Courts. Such separated people earn too much for Legal Aid plan and not enough to hire an experienced family law lawyer. The result is a clogged up court system. Self-represented people are slowing down the court process because they simply don't know what they are doing. As a result of my initial column, distressed separated people have been calling ProBono Ontario non-stop. The agency called me to ask readers to stop calling. So everybody, stop calling! But if there was no problem and Legal Aid was the real answer then why would ProBono Ontario be getting so many calls? Readers may wish to write the Law Society with letters of inquiry and ask about the possibility of a new service to facilitate the ability of experienced lawyers to provide probono work in family law.

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