

The Board of Directors of Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services has reviewed and discussed the GTA Legal Clinics Transformation Project Vision Report that was released on August 27, 2014. The following resolution was passed at our AGM of October 16, 2014.

In our discussions, we noted a number of serious concerns, including:

1. we are being asked to endorse a vision that will result in the closure of our clinic;
2. although the Vision Report states that the proposed model “reinforces community control by and accountability to the communities they serve and their attentiveness to the needs of their communities”, the proposal, if implemented, would appear to have the opposite effect;
3. replacement clinic law service centres, just three for all of Toronto, would be located at inconvenient distances for our community members and would not be grounded in deep knowledge of our community;
4. no evidence is cited in the Report to support its assertions of the benefits of the proposed new service centres;
5. the claimed efficiency gains appear, on the limited information provided in the Report, to be based on unrealistically low assessments of the need for support staff and intake services in these large centres, and to fail to take into account the vastly-increased amount of time staff will have to spend travelling to serve more distant communities;
6. neither the core elements of the proposal, nor the proposal as a whole, have been tested in practice, whereas the existing community-based model has been successful in over 60 different Ontario communities over the last 40 years;
7. the Report contains no discussion or analysis of, and therefore gives no weight to, what would be lost when community-based clinics are eliminated in favour of the new model;
8. the proposal does not set out for serious consideration an alternative reform option that would build on, rather than eliminate, the demonstrated strengths of community-based clinics such as ours;
9. the proposal fails to consider the significant new resources for legal aid promised in Ontario’s July 2014 Budget;
10. no materials have been prepared or provided that are in languages and formats suitable for community discussions of the proposal and its profound implications.

In these circumstances, the Board cannot, and does not, endorse the Vision Report’s proposal. Nonetheless, being in broad agreement with the principles set out in the Report, the Board remains committed to working on transformation. The Board will, with its community and with other clinics, develop community-based reform initiatives to strengthen our community, improve our capacity to provide services, and give local effect to the 2013 Ontario-wide Clinic Strategic Plan.