

Message from CLA President, John Struthers

This week the Criminal Lawyers' Association (CLA) has mobilized our 1500 members who volunteered in a massive show of support for the justice system and the public.

We have placed Counsel in every Court in the Province to assist during this pandemic. These counsel have worked tirelessly to secure the release of hundreds of persons who might otherwise have been at high risk of infection while incarcerated. We continue to be concerned for the 7000 incarcerated persons in Ontario. Two thirds of these incarcerated people are presumed innocent and awaiting trial.

Legal Aid Ontario has acted in an exemplary way on behalf of the public and their staff. The frontline Duty Counsel have gone face-to-face with the dangers of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The CLA is proud to have served alongside Legal Aid Ontario's fearless Duty Counsel.

Our Crown Attorneys, Court Reporters, Clerks, Court Officers and staff have fought back personal concerns and done their jobs admirably and with compassion. We are concerned for the safety and health of all justice system participants. We are of the view all justice system workers and participants in the Ontario Court of Justice are at risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 by appearing in person. We can no longer assume this risk.

So with regret, and in order to protect our members and the public:

The Criminal Lawyers' Association has determined that we must have our volunteers leave all Courthouses after Friday, March 20th at 12 Noon.

We will all be available to work remotely and put ourselves at the disposal of the Chief Justice, Regional Senior Justices, Local Administrative Justices, Legal Aid Ontario and on behalf of the clients to act. We are here to serve the justice system but we can no longer do so while putting our health and the health of our loved ones at risk. We all must work to flatten the curve and give our Health Care system a fighting chance. Our off site embedded volunteers will continue.

We anticipate the Ontario Court of Justice will implement systems to allow us all to work remotely so we can safely work together while we battle COVID-19.

Yours very truly,

John Struthers