

VOLUNTEER FAQs – PBO FREE LEGAL ADVICE HOTLINE

WHO CAN VOLUNTEER AT THE HOTLINE?

Volunteering at the hotline is open to any lawyer at full status with the Law Society of Ontario or any lawyer who is at partial status but has practised law full time for at least two years. If you are at partial status, please let us know and we will help you with a form you need to submit to the Law Society. If you don't meet these requirements but wish to volunteer, PBO is still prepared to review your experience and consider whether you can volunteer.

HOW DO I BECOME A HOTLINE VOLUNTEER?

Very easily. Tell any PBO staff member that you're interested, or fill in our simple online application form, found here: <https://www.probonoontario.org/volunteer/applications/hotline/>. It's a good idea to email Nicole Kellow at nicole@probonoontario.org since she will help you get scheduled for your first volunteer session.

WHAT AREAS OF LAW DOES THE HOTLINE COVER?

The Hotline helps with “everyday” civil legal issues. This includes civil procedure, employment, consumer protection and debt, housing, wills/estates/powers of attorney, and corporate law for charities, non-profits and small businesses. When you sign up for a shift, you will be asked which of these areas you'd like to advise on. Only calls from the selected areas will be routed to you. You can select more than one area of law if you choose.

IS THERE TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS?

Yes. Prior to your volunteer session, you will receive an orientation and technology guide and a knowledge management manual that includes supporting material to help you respond to Frequently Asked Questions in each area of law you choose. On the day of your volunteer session, you'll also receive an in-person tutorial on how to use the technology. It's really simple.

WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE LEVEL IN THESE AREAS OF LAW?

We have a robust knowledge management database and easy access to online resources that will enable you to competently take calls in one or more of the areas we service. Staff lawyers are also on hand to assist you.

WHAT IF I JUST CAN'T ANSWER A QUESTION?

That's fine. If there is another available lawyer who can help, we will help you transfer the call. If not, you can always gather information and we can tell the caller when a lawyer with more experience in the area covered by the question will be available at the Hotline.

HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE TO COMMIT?

Volunteers are asked to spend one day per quarter or a half day per month at the Hotline. On each day they are scheduled, lawyers attend between 9am and 4pm. The phones go live at 9:30 am and there is a break for lunch.

WHERE DO I GO?

The Hotline is located at PBO's head office at 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 900. Yes, there is lots of construction in the area, but it's super close to the Eglinton subway station and there is lots of parking nearby (and tons of convenient places to eat and run errands).

CAN I VOLUNTEER FROM MY HOME OR OFFICE?

Not yet. It's early days so we need volunteers to be on-site. In the future, we plan to acquire more licences and give lawyers the opportunity to take calls from their home or office anywhere in the province.

WHAT IF I LIVE OUTSIDE THE GTA?

Please still tell us if you are interested. For lawyers in Ottawa, there is an opportunity to participate in the Hotline at our help centre in the 161 Elgin Street Courthouse. PBO wants this opportunity to be available to lawyers across Ontario. As soon as we are ready to engage volunteers remotely, we'll let you know. Also, we may learn about matters in your area that you could help with.

WHO WILL I BE HELPING?

You'll be giving direct, just-in-time assistance to Ontarians who can't afford a lawyer and don't qualify for Legal Aid. In other words, they have nowhere else to turn. You'll also be helping them in a way that is incredibly convenient for them. The Hotline overcomes barriers to justice including geography, disability, childcare obligations, or inflexible work schedules.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL I HELP?

Calls last approximately 30 minutes so it's common for volunteers to help up to a dozen a people a day. It's an extremely gratifying and rewarding experience.

DO I MEET CLIENTS?

No. All services are provided over the phone. The Hotline location is not a drop-in location.

WHAT TYPE OF SERVICES WILL I PROVIDE?

Hotline volunteers are providing 'short-term, pro bono-legal services.' This means services are summary in nature, with no expectation of an ongoing lawyer-client relationship. When a call ends, you have no duty to provide further legal services to the caller. You will find that, often, you are helping people who know nothing about the legal system understand the nature of their legal problem, understand the implications of their options and help them decide what course to take. Callers can call back if they need more help later on.

WHAT ABOUT CONFLICTS OF INTEREST?

When providing 'short-term, pro bono-legal services,' lawyers do not need to take steps to determine if there is a conflict. You can start talking to the caller right away. If you discover that an existing client of yours is adverse in interest to the caller **in the same or a related matter**, you will withdraw from the call and ask PBO to transfer it. This scenario is extremely rare.

AM I INSURED?

Yes. If you are covered by LawPro, your usual coverage applies. If you are exempt from premiums, you simply need to keep that exemption current and you receive run-off coverage. You can review the arrangements in this handy chart: http://www.lawpro.ca/insurance/Practice_type/probono.asp

DO I GET CPD CREDIT?

Not yet, but our goal is to obtain CPD coverage for at least some of the pro bono hours you work.