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Impact of Refugee and Immigration Law Services Funding Cuts on LGBTQ Refugee Claimants

The provincial funding cuts impacting refugee and immigration law services at Legal Aid Ontario has left us gravely concerned for the wellbeing and safety of LGBTQ refugee claimants who are in desperate need of trauma-informed and accessible legal assistance.

Across the globe, LGBTQ folks experience significant threat, intimidation and violence in their countries of origin, which precipitates their refugee claims in Canada. Many LGBTQ refugee claimants continue to face homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism and xenophobia in Canada through contact with shelters, health and legal systems, and settlement services, further intensifying their trauma.

The refugee claim process is particularly challenging, invasive and traumatic for LGBTQ folks. In addition to reliving their trauma and collecting evidence that proves and legitimizes their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, they must also navigate through unfamiliar and complicated legal systems and social realities. These experiences are further intensified by language barriers and access to services. LGBTQ refugee claimants deal with significant fear and uncertainty about the refugee claim process and often feel overwhelmed and re-traumatized.

The 519 urges the provincial government to continue their support for all refugee claimants, including LGBTQ folks, to have access to free and competent legal representation through Legal Aid Ontario, so that their claims are judged fairly and equitably by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). This is critical to their wellbeing and resettlement process in Canada.