



MEDIA RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
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CALC Executive Director appointed to the Order of Canada, reinforcing the importance of legal advocacy and empowering vulnerable and marginalized populations

Michele Leering, Executive Director and lawyer with the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC), has been appointed to the Order of Canada (the Order), one of the Country's highest honours.

Recently, the Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, announced that Ms. Leering would be [invested into the Order as a Member](#), which recognizes individuals who have made a difference in the country. The Order, created in 1967, is reserved for individuals who have made outstanding contributions that enrich the lives of Canadians and helped build a better country.

"This national honour reinforces Michele's lifelong dedication and commitment to meeting the legal needs of individuals who would experience legal crises without the help of community legal clinics," says Peter Kerr, Board Chair for CALC. "We remain incredibly fortunate to have Michele leading the team at CALC, and working to improve the lives and legal outcomes of marginalized individuals in our region." Kerr notes that "it is particularly fitting that this recognition comes just as CALC celebrates 40 years of community service effective December 1."

"I am both humbled and honoured to have been appointed as a Member of the Order," says Leering. "At CALC, we believe that access to justice is a right deserved by everyone regardless of their income. It is critical to recognize that my commitment to justice has not been an individual pursuit: it has only been possible with the support and dedication of CALC's Board and staff team, my colleagues in Ontario's community legal clinic system and Legal Aid Ontario, as well as our community partners who have worked with us on many social justice issues over these many years."

CALC is a non-profit community legal clinic that works collaboratively with community partners to improve access to legal services and support for individuals living on a low-income or in poverty. The need for equitable access to legal services has become even more imperative as marginalized individuals continue to be disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. "In the coming months, we must ensure that [principles for a just](#)

For further information about the contents of this press release, please contact Peter Kerr, Board Chair, at ptrkrr@gmail.com or Michele Leering, Executive Director/Lawyer at leeringm@lao.on.ca.

[recovery](#) are used to design income security, housing and other solutions that improve the lives of those who are most vulnerable,” notes Leering.

As reported in April, the pandemic has created [significant financial and social pressures](#) for individuals already living on low income or in poverty. While pandemic relief programs resulted in temporary solutions for some, many individuals already living in poverty were ineligible for these programs. In 2020, [CALC continued to receive requests](#) for assistance with housing, income security, consumer and debt, human rights, and employment problems. In addition, many CALC clients simply do not have access to the technology and virtual services that are keeping the majority of the population connected to others. This technological gap, paired with isolation, distancing, and transportation challenges, makes it increasingly difficult to provide equitable services to individuals in need. Leering notes that “in the New Year, CALC staff will update our community on a growing lack of justice that cannot be remedied by charitable responses. These challenges include Tribunal practices that discriminate against the poor who do not have access to technology, social benefits that fall far below the pre-COVID poverty line, and the desperation faced those who are homeless or inadequately or unsafely housed. In CALC’s 41st year of community-based justice work, we will become more vocal on what changes need to be made to ensure equal justice for all.”

CALC is one of more than 70 community legal clinics providing free legal services across the province, funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Founded in 1980, staff provide poverty law services to low income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward, Lennox & Addington counties and Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. During the pandemic, staff provide services by phone or email, and in-person meetings are reserved for exceptional circumstances. After the pandemic recedes, we expect to return to seeing people in person in our main Belleville office, as well as in satellite locations in Amherstview, Bancroft, Madoc, Marmora, Napanee, Picton, Trenton, Tweed and Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. For more information, visit CALC’s [Legal Services](#) page, and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep in touch with the latest legal news. Visit CALC’s website at www.communitylegalcentre.ca. For information on our holiday hours in 2020, please see this [announcement](#).

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Community Advocacy & Legal Centre
158 George Street, Belleville, ON K8N 3H2
www.communitylegalcentre.ca