

Labour picket heats up minister's Bronte constituency office

by David Lea

Oakville Beaver Staff

A group of legal aid lawyers picketed outside Oakville MPP and Ontario Labour Minister Kevin Flynn's constituency office July 28 as part of an ongoing campaign to gain collective bargaining rights.

About 20 legal aid lawyers marched outside the Lakeshore Road office waving signs reading "Bargaining Rights Now," and "Fairness For Legal Aid Ontario. Flynn talk to Wynne."

The Society of Energy Professionals Union, which seeks to represent the lawyers, also participated in the demonstration.

"Today, we are here to protest three and a half years of the Wynne and Flynn government not allowing legal aid lawyers their collective bargaining rights," said Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler of the Society of Energy Professionals.

"These are basic democratic rights the Supreme Court has upheld and it is more than time to recognize they (Legal Aid Ontario lawyers) want a union, they've picked the Society of Energy Professionals as the union of their choice and it is time to let them have a fair deal."

Legal Aid Ontario lawyer Dana Fisher, who works as a duty council at College Park Court in Toronto, said her group is facing many challenges, from working conditions to the direction the profession is taking, to



Legal Aid Ontario lawyers, along with members of the Society of Energy Professionals, picketed in front of Ontario Labour Minister and Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn's constituency office on Lakeshore Road last week. The protest came the day after the Changing Workplace Review interim report on labour and employment law was released.

| photo by Graham Paine – Oakville Beaver (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog or facebook.com/HaltonPhotog)

professional and ethical obligations.

"We just want to have a collective voice where we can raise these concerns and be closer to equal at the table, at least, with our employer," said Fisher.

"One of the issues I have at the office I work at is a lack of space. I don't have my own desk. I don't have a place where I can interview clients privately. The ability to provide confidential legal advice is very important to us and we

don't have that space... That is something we would hope to engage our employer on."

Fisher also noted the lack of space at her office makes it difficult for her to meet on the premises with clients who have mobility issues.

Flynn was not present at the constituency office when the protest took place.

When reached for comment Ministry of Labour spokesperson Craig McBride said the matter is before the courts.

"We support protests and we have no problem with people protesting. That's well within their rights," he said.

"At the moment there are legal proceedings going on so there isn't much we can say about this issue."

During the protest Chaleff-Freudenthaler said the Legal Aid Ontario lawyers have been waiting long enough to have their right to collective bargaining rights recognized.

"That this government won't make it fair is really disturbing to us," he said.

"Legal Aid Ontario lawyers serve some of the most vulnerable people in our society, who need access to justice whether it is in criminal courts or family courts, trying to get supports from their spouses for their children... These (clients) have so little and just need the basic semblance of fairness that our legal system is supposed to provide and yet here is the government shutting out the lawyers who provide this service. The irony there is just a little too thick."

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