



# Black Legal Action Centre

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## **Submissions to the Economic and Community Development Committee on the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism - Update**

Submissions By:

THE BLACK LEGAL ACTION CENTRE (BLAC)

June 26, 2019

*“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”*

—James Baldwin (1924-1987)

The Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC) is a speciality community legal clinic that works to combat individual and systemic anti-Black racism through the provision of legal aid services across Ontario. BLAC’s vision is a society where anti-Black racism is named and meaningfully addressed; where the humanity and dignity of Black people are centred; where the laws and the legal system are reflective of the real experiences of Black people; and where racial equity and full participation of all Black people in society is achieved.

BLAC provides legal representation to low and no-income Black Ontarians on matters related to housing and shelter, income maintenance, social assistance, human rights, health, employment, and education. In addition to individual representation, BLAC also engages in test case litigation, law reform, and community development. BLAC also provides summary legal advice, brief services, and public legal education.

BLAC was born out of the needs of the Black community, specifically as it relates to the disproportionate and troubling ways in which Black people are mistreated, scrutinized and brutalized by legal institutions and systems of power. The experiences of Black Canadians today are rooted in our country's history of colonialism, slavery and segregation. Anti-Black racism still exists today in Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in the world, permeating every aspect of our lives and work in this city.

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Firstly, BLAC would like to commend the work of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (Unit), all the Black organizations and Black people involved in this work, including the Partnership and Accountability Circle (PAC), for their shared leadership and ownership of this Plan. The work that has been achieved in year one is commendable.

BLAC is especially grateful for the Unit's work in advancing the shift towards democratizing the collection and reporting of race-based disaggregated data to improve the outcomes and well-being of Black communities. This work builds upon the work that so many members of our community and others have done and are continuing to do, and will create increased accountability, transparency and evidenced-based policy-making for Black Torontonians. BLAC is fortunate to be a part of actualizing this work, as we are currently working with other individuals and groups on Action item 17.1 by providing input on the Toronto Police Services Board's draft policy for the collection and use of demographic data.

BLAC also recognizes the importance of having a Unit dedicated to ensuring that an Anti-Black Racism Analysis remains on the Toronto Police Service (TPS) agenda. This is important because it works to change the nature, culture, training and outcomes of the TPS in its interactions with Black communities in Toronto.

Secondly, BLAC is deeply concerned and disappointed with the Provincial Government's recent cuts to legal aid funding, education, social services, public health, and changes to police oversight, combined with the roll back of funding and other supports towards the Anti-Racism Directorate and other anti-racism initiatives. It is BLAC's position that these cuts will disproportionately affect the Black community, by creating more political, economic, and legal obstacles for our full participation in society.

Given all this, it is extremely important that the City of Toronto provide leadership to sustainably institutionalize and resource anti-Black racism work that focuses on enhancing the health, well-being and belonging of Black communities. We implore this Committee to continue supporting the work of the Unit in order for the key deliverables to be met in the upcoming year and in years to come.

We look forward to continuing to support the work of the Unit, the PAC, and its partners in actualizing the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

**THE BLACK LEGAL ACTION CENTRE**