



Braiding Diversity into Justice

Wednesday October 29th 2025

8:30 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel S. Sharpe, DSO, MP Courthouse

150 Bond St E, Oshawa, ON L1G 0A2

Program Agenda and Speaker Biographies

8:30 a.m. Arrival, Security Clearance and Check in

Main lobby and 2nd floor

9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Opening Ceremony and Keynote Address 🎤

Courtroom #208

Hosted by the Honourable Justice Leef, Judge – Superior Court of Justice

Keynote Address by her Worship, Justice of the Peace De Gannes

Get ready to be inspired by Her Worship, Justice of the Peace De Gannes — a trailblazer in the Ontario justice system and a true powerhouse of leadership! Appointed to the Ontario Court of Justice in 2007 and as Regional Senior Justice of the Peace in 2019, she has spent her career breaking barriers, championing human rights, and shaping programs that make a real difference in people's lives. From her early work in domestic violence, bail safety, and victim services, to her deep expertise in labour relations and mediation, Her Worship has consistently led with integrity, vision, and heart.

A proud member of multiple justice and equity committees and a 2020 honouree of the 100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women, she embodies excellence, inspiration, and empowerment. Don't miss this chance to hear from a leader whose career shows what's possible when talent, dedication, and lived experience come together — Her Worship De Gannes is truly one-of-a-kind!

Group Photo 📷

Main Lobby

9:30 – 11:00 a.m. Profile of Careers – Leveraging Lived Experiences 👤 ✨

Courtroom #208

Meet justice sector professionals who are making remarkable contributions to the Canadian legal system every day, and hear how they've used their lived experiences to thrive in their work. Which panelist's journey resonates with you? Be sure to follow up and connect with them during the networking session or mentorship lunch.

11:00 - 11:30 a.m. Making Connections 🤝 🍏

2nd Floor Boardroom

Get your energy up with some tasty snacks while taking part in an interactive activity designed to boost your networking skills! This is your chance to connect with fellow participants, practice starting conversations, and build meaningful connections in a fun, relaxed environment.

11:30 – 12:00 p.m. Who Were The Famous Five? The Person’s Case 🗣️ 🗨️

“Who Were the Famous Five?”

Ready to test your knowledge of one of the most important moments in Canadian legal history? We’ll be watching a short video about The Person’s Case — the groundbreaking fight that changed the definition of “person” in Canada and opened the doors for women to participate fully in public life. Pay close attention, because after the video, you’ll have a chance to answer some quiz questions for a prize.

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Inside the Halls of Justice Courthouse Tour 🕒 🏛️

Step inside the Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel S. Sharpe, DSO, MP Courthouse at 150 Bond Street East, Oshawa, and discover where justice comes to life. During this guided tour, you’ll discover interesting facts, while increasing your knowledge of our legal system. The courthouse is named in honour of Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel S. Sharpe, a local lawyer, Member of Parliament, and decorated First World War officer who became a strong advocate for veterans’ mental health after the war — long before it was widely discussed. This is your chance to experience the justice system up close and walk the same halls where important decisions are made every day.

1:00 – 2:15 p.m. Mentorship Lunch – Building Your Future in Law 🍴 ⚖️

Join us for a Mentorship Lunch where you’ll have the unique opportunity to connect directly with professionals from across the justice sector! This special session — **sponsored by Rohr Law, Richter Grewal Di Lorenzo LLP, Jacula Law, Creighton Law, Walker Head Lawyers, and the Crown’s Office**, and proudly **supported by Legal Aid Ontario** — offers students a chance to enjoy lunch while engaging in meaningful conversations with lawyers. Hear real stories, ask questions, and gain valuable insights into the many paths a legal career can take. Come hungry for food **and** inspiration — your future in law starts here.

2:15 – 3:30 p.m. Speed Mentoring – Real Conversations, Real Careers ⚡ ⚖️

Ever wondered what it really takes to build a career in law? Our Speed Mentoring session gives you the chance to have honest, small-group conversations with legal professionals who have been where you are — and made it to where you want to go. This is your opportunity to ask the questions you might not ask in a large group and hear the real stories behind legal careers that can sometimes seem distant or unrelatable. Bring your curiosity and an open mind — these quick, powerful conversations might just change how you see your future in law.

The **Public Legal Education Committee of Durham Region** extends heartfelt thanks to the sponsors and supporters of **Braiding Diversity Into Justice 2025**. Your generosity and commitment make this program possible.

Thank you to:

- **Durham Region Law Association**
- **Creighton Law – Brian Hall**
- **Jacula Law – Mark Jacula**
- **Richter Grewal Di Lorenzo LLP**
- **Rohr Law – Rachel Rohr**
- **Walker Head Lawyers**
- **Courts Administration of Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel S. Sharpe, DSO, MP Courthouse**
- **Legal Aid Ontario**
- **Durham Region Crown’s Office**
- **Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)**

Your support helps inspire the next generation of legal professionals and champions diversity within the justice system.



Mark Jacula



Braiding Diversity Into Justice: Speaker Biographies

Host:

The Honourable Madam Justice Leef, Superior Court of Justice

Madam Justice Leef was raised in Ottawa. She received both her undergraduate degree (1992) and LL.B. (1995) from the University of Ottawa and was called to the Ontario Bar in 1997. For nineteen years, Justice Leef was a partner at the law firm of Pender & Leef, specializing in the area of family law and child protection. She has been an active panel lawyer for Legal Aid Ontario throughout her career and has represented some of the most vulnerable members of our society. She was also a panel lawyer with the Office of the Children's Lawyer, representing children in family and child protection proceedings for over fourteen years. In 2018, Justice Leef was appointed to the Superior Court of Justice, Family Court where she presides over family and child protection matters.



Justice Leef has been an active member of the legal community throughout her career. While a lawyer, she served on many committees and mentored young lawyers for Legal Aid Ontario, while also participating in the planning and delivery of several continuing legal education programs, with a particular focus on the area of child protection. Since her appointment, Justice Leef has chaired the Durham Best Practices Committee, Dispute Resolution Officer Committee and co-chaired the Public Legal Education Committee.



Keynote: *Her Worship, Justice of the Peace De Gannes*

Her Worship, Martha De Gannes was appointed to the Ontario Court of Justice bench in June 2007 for Newmarket, Central East Region and appointed in March 2019 as the Regional Senior Justice of Peace. Prior to this appointment, Her Worship was the local administrative Justice of the Peace for Oshawa, Ontario. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree (Sociology) with a minor in Legal studies from the University of Waterloo. Following her undergraduate degree Her Worship held management positions with the Ministry of the Attorney General Criminal Law Division over-seeing justice matters related to Domestic Violence, Bail Safety Program and victim services. Prior to her appointment, she worked as a Labour Relations Advisor with a special interest in human rights. Her Worship has more than 10 years in Human Resources consulting and mediation.

She is a member of the Public Legal Education Committee, the Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee as well as the Chief Justice, Ontario Court of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Justice of the Peace De Gannes has been the recipient of many leadership awards including in 2020 being an honouree, of the 100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women.

Nafisa Nazarali (Family Law/Civil Lawyer)



Nafisa Nazarali graduated with highest distinction, Summa Cum Laude with an Honours Bachelor of Arts from York University and completed her Juris Doctor Program at Osgoode Hall Law School in 2009. She has been practicing exclusively in the area of family law since her call to the bar in 2010.

Nafisa began her career as a family law lawyer at a small firm in Brampton in 2010. After starting a family, she wanted to be closer to home and accepted a position as a junior associate and worked her way up to the role of senior managing associate lawyer at the firm. In December 2022, Nafisa pursued her dream of owning a practice and along with her partners, Jason Isenberg and Adam Borer, formed INB Family Law LLP.

Nafisa is actively involved in her community. She is the current chair of the Malvern Family Resource Centre, Secretary and Chair of the Durham Regional Law Association, Board Member of Collaborative Practice Durham Region and Board Member of the Ontario Association of Collaborative Professionals. She sat on the Board of Directors of Luke's Place from March 2015 – May 2023.

Antoinette Lewis (Duty Counsel - Lawyer)

Antoinette Lewis obtained her Honours B.A. and her LL.B from York University. She was called to the Bar of Ontario in 2008. Antoinette started her legal career as an associate with then Cooper, Sandler, West, practicing mainly in criminal law. After the birth of her first child, Antoinette started her own practice, where she focused on criminal and real estate law, she worked as an Assistant Crown Attorney on a per diem basis, and she taught provincial offences and family law in the Faculty of Continuing Education at Seneca College. Shortly after the birth of her second child in 2015, she joined Legal Aid Ontario where she provides legal assistance to youth and lower income individuals dealing with matters in criminal law and family law.

Duty counsel lawyers with Legal Aid Ontario provide free, immediate legal assistance to people who appear in court without a lawyer. They help accused persons understand the charges against them, explain court procedures, and offer advice about legal options such as pleas, bail, or adjournments. In criminal court, they can speak to the court on a person's behalf for routine matters, negotiate with the Crown, and assist with bail hearings. In family court, duty counsel may help with urgent issues like child custody, support, or protection matters. Their main role is to ensure that individuals without legal representation still have access to fair treatment and basic legal guidance during their court appearances.





Steve Simpson (Civil Litigation Lawyer)

Steve Simpson is a lawyer who has dedicated his career to transforming his client's legal threats into opportunities. Steve has served as lead counsel at all levels of court in Ontario. He maintains an active litigation practice. This includes motions, trials, and appeals. His experience includes contract disputes, insurance coverage matters, employment issues, real estate litigation, and professional negligence claims. He previously led the Canadian litigation team for a major insurance and asset management company. There, he managed and defended class actions. He also handled complex commercial disputes and life and health claims.

When he is not practicing law, Steve gives back to his community. He mentors aspiring law students and junior lawyers. He is a member of the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers and serves on his law school's alumni association board. He sits on his children's school parent council. In his free time, Steve enjoys reading science fiction and cycling across the city.

Thusha Mayuran (Senior Counsel (lawyer), Intact Insurance)

Thusha Mayuran is a Senior Insurance Defense counsel at a large national insurance company. Thusha earned her law degree at the University of Windsor Ontario in 2011. Thusha had wanted to be a lawyer since the age of 9 but was not always hopeful that she would be able to achieve that dream. Thusha's pivotal experience was the Co-op program she was fortunate enough to complete with Justice Catrina Braid at the Department of Justice in high school. This invaluable exposure to the legal sector, and the courtroom, inspired Thusha to be a litigation lawyer. She began her legal career representing vulnerable individuals with low-income at a legal aid clinic in York Region. Today, she lives in Durham with her husband and son.



Sebastian Duff (Partner - Family Lawyer) Snell Balka Scovino Lawyers)



Sebastian practices exclusively in the area of family law. His litigation experience includes property claims, decision-making/access disputes, and child/spousal support issues. Sebastian frequently attends the Superior Court; however, he is skilled in alternative dispute resolution.. He is a member of the Collaborative Practice Durham Region, the Durham Region Lawyers' Association, and the Advocates' Society. Sebastian also volunteers at Luke's Place Pro Bono Legal Clinic. Sebastian holds a Bachelor of Arts in Justice Studies from Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia and a Bachelor of Laws from Cardiff University in the United Kingdom. Sebastian was called to the Bar of Ontario in 2013. Prior to that, he worked for the leading global reinsurance company in London, England and with a prominent family law lawyer in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Rachel Rohr (Founder Family Lawyer – Rohr Law)



Rachel has practiced and worked in family law exclusively throughout her legal career. Family law is more than a job to Rachel, it is a passion to help those who may be going through what can be extremely difficult time in their lives, planning for the future, or helping families navigate a new normal. Rachel can assist in all aspects of family law including parenting, asset division and support. Rachel believes that family law is not a one size fits all approach and is ready to provide high-quality legal service with the client at the center.

Rachel completed her articles and summered in Toronto in small and large family law practices. Rachel obtained her J.D. from the University of Windsor and was Called to the Bar of Ontario in March 2021. In fact, before deciding to attend law school, Rachel was a law clerk to Mr. Barry Carmichael for several years. Rachel has been published in the Journal of Canadian Studies and co-authored and annotated statute. Beyond the practice of family law, Rachel has interests in human rights and tax law. Outside of the law, Rachel can often be found tending to children, walking her two corgis or baking a cake.

Mara Clarke, Family Lawyer

While starting her legal career in the areas of securities and corporate law, upon being called to the Bar in 2008, Mara Clarke returned to her social justice/public legal education roots when she joined the outreach team of Ontario Justice Education Network. In her role as Director of Outreach, Mara was responsible for managing the team that vulnerable youth about the law. In this role, Mara designed family law public legal education programs for some of Ontario's most vulnerable mothers, because of this challenging work, Mara found her passion: family law. Mara is a family lawyer. Her resolution focused, culturally sensitive approach to family law practice prioritizes her client's interests and the parties' relationship, helping them establish the "new normal" that will allow guide their interactions moving forward.



Lori Lajoie, Trial Coordinator – Ontario Court of Justice

Lori Lajoie started working with the Ministry of the Attorney General in June 1989. She is currently the Trial Coordinator at Oshawa Ontario Court of Justice (criminal court) and has been in that role since 2003. Prior to that, Ms. Lajoie was the assistant Trial Coordinator for 3 years and a courtroom clerk/registrar for 10 years. Ms. Lajoie is the Eagle Feather Keeper for the Courthouse. Ms. Lajoie is Mattawa North Bay Algonquin First Nation/French and Ukrainian, she obtained her law clerk diploma.

Professor Ruebe James, Durham College

Ruebe James is currently defence litigation counsel with Co-operators Canada. Ruebe received an Honours B.A. (Sociology and Criminology) in 2013 from the University of Toronto, and her J.D. in 2018 from the University of Windsor. Ruebe also completed a paralegal program at Durham College in 2014. She was called to the Ontario Bar in 2019. Prior to joining Co-operators, Ruebe worked at another large Canadian insurer and a small insurance defence litigation firm in Toronto. Prior to law school, Ruebe worked as an assistant in family law at two law firms in the Durham Region. In addition to her legal practice, Ruebe also teaches within the Faculty of Social and Community Service and the Faculty of Business at Durham College.



Melissa Belliveau, Lawyer and Mediator

Melissa graduated from Queen's University Faculty of Law in 2006 and was called to the bar in June 2007. Melissa received an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice and Public Policy from the University of Guelph in 2003. As a longtime resident of Oshawa, Melissa is proud to have a practice which is connected to the community and provides a broad range of Family Law and Employment Law services to her clients.

In addition to her work, Melissa is busy raising a young family and is a member of the Board of Directors for Collaborative Practice Durham Region, is a member of the legal advisory group at Luke's Place, and volunteers as a Pro bono lawyer at Luke's place. Melissa has been a panel lawyer with Legal Aid Ontario since 2017 and in 2019 Melissa was appointed as a Dispute Resolution Officer with the Superior Court of Justice. In 2020 Melissa obtained her certificate in Family Mediation through York University.



Krystal Tavernier, Owner and Licensed Paralegal, BFWB Legal & Associates



Krystal is a licensed paralegal in private practice with her own firm providing legal services to our community specifically focusing on records suspension applications. Her firm provides mobile notary services in addition to contracts, applications and other services with our associates. Krystal previously worked for the Ministry of the Attorney General in various seconded legal branches and finishing her career in public service at the Office of the Assistant Deputy Attorney General for the Civil Law Division as the Executive Advisor. Her transition to the private sector comes after a personal transition to be able to give back to her community and refocus on her priorities.

Huddah Nawaz, Court Clerk, Ontario Court of Justice



Huddah graduated from the University of Toronto in 2024 with an Honours B.A. in Political Science and

Sociology and recently completed a post graduate certificate from Conestoga College in Immigration and Refugee Case Management. Since 2022, she has worked in court administration at the Durham Courthouse as a registrar and a court and client representative. In her role, Huddah supports judges and justices of the peace both inside and outside the courtroom by managing records, preparing dockets, processing legal documents, and ensuring that proceedings run efficiently and in accordance with legal procedures. She works closely with the public, counsel, police, and other justice partners, maintaining professionalism and discretion in a fast-paced environment. Committed to promoting diversity and accessibility within the justice system,

Huddah believes that representation and inclusive practices are essential to ensuring fairness and trust in the courts.

Court clerks in the Ontario Court of Justice play an essential role in ensuring that court proceedings run efficiently and in accordance with proper legal procedures. They assist judges and justices of the peace both inside and outside the courtroom by performing a wide range of administrative and procedural duties. In court, clerks open and close sessions, record proceedings, swear in witnesses, manage exhibits, read charges or verdicts, and ensure that the proper decorum and process are maintained.

