

INFO GUIDE

June 2016

Amicus Curiae Counsel at Court of Appeal Hearings from the Ontario Review Board

This Info Guide has been prepared by the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office in the Ministry of Health for general informational purposes only. It does not contain legal advice. If you have a question, or would like advice about your specific legal situation, you should contact a lawyer.

What is amicus curiae?

- Amicus curiae (“amicus”) is a Latin phrase which means “friend of the court.” Amicus is a lawyer who is appointed by the court to assist both the unrepresented person and the court by clarifying information and/or raising new legal issues.

What is the amicus program for Ontario Review Board appeals at the Court of Appeal?

- In 2001, the Court of Appeal developed an *amicus* program for persons who were appealing decisions from the Ontario Review Board and who were not represented by a lawyer. In developing this program, the Court received input from the Mental Health Legal Committee, the Criminal Lawyers’ Association and the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Am I allowed to have my own lawyer for my Ontario Review Board appeal?

- Yes, you may retain a lawyer of your choice. Amicus is only appointed if you do not have a lawyer. Speak with your Patient Advocate for more information on how to get a lawyer and apply for legal aid.

How does amicus help me?

- Amicus can help you by presenting arguments or advising the court of relevant legal principles that may strengthen your case.
- Amicus may also help you by providing you with information about the court process.
- Amicus does not represent you at the Court of Appeal or take instructions from you for legal representation.

When does the court appoint amicus?

- Once the Court of Appeal receives notice from you that you are appealing a decision of the Ontario Review Board, the court will determine if you have a lawyer for the appeal. If you do not have a lawyer, and even if you choose to represent yourself, *amicus* will be appointed.
- If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, but do not have one, the Patient Advocate can assist you to obtain a lawyer and apply for legal aid.
- If you do not want a lawyer, the Patient Advocate will inform the court.
- The court will notify you by letter that *amicus* has been appointed, along with the name, phone number and address of *amicus*.

Who are the amicus lawyers and who pays their fees?

- Amicus lawyers are qualified and experienced lawyers who deal extensively with mental health law. They are recommended to the Court of Appeal by both the Mental Health Legal Committee and the Criminal Lawyers' Association.
- The Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General pays the fees of *amicus*.

Can I speak to amicus before my hearing?

- Yes. The name and contact information for *amicus* will be provided to you in advance of the hearing date. If you do not call *amicus*, he or she will usually call you before the hearing date to ask you for details about your appeal and to answer any of your questions.

Will I be able to speak to the court if amicus was appointed?

- Yes. The court assigns time limits for the parties to make oral arguments at the hearing. Generally, both you and *amicus* will have a total of 30 minutes to speak.

Can I refuse the assistance of amicus?

- You cannot fire *amicus* as he or she is not your lawyer.
- You can choose not to work with *amicus* or agree with his or her legal arguments, but he or she is required to attend your hearing and assist the court.

Questions?

- Basic information about the appeals process can be given to you by calling the Court of Appeal at 416-327-5020.
- If you have questions, contact your local Patient Advocate or Rights Adviser or call the central office of the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office at 1-800-578-2343.