



MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

The Association of Justices of the Peace of Ontario (AJPO)

The Association of Justices of the Peace of Ontario supports and advances the professionalism and judicial independence of its members. The Association promotes awareness of the judicial role and its importance to a fair and efficient judicial system.

The Association also advocates on behalf of Justices of the Peace on matters related to workload, education, working conditions, and remuneration. It represents members who serve or have served in Ontario Courts of Justice across the province of Ontario.

What does a Justice of the Peace do?

- Justices of the Peace play an important role in our judicial system. In many cases they are a person's first – and sometimes only – contact with the courts. They preside over a wide range of matters, dealing with more than 200 different pieces of legislation, criminal code matters and municipal by-laws.
- Justices of the Peace make fundamental decisions about individual rights and freedoms through bail/bond hearings, search warrants, arrest warrants and summons. They also hear matters related to violations of provincial and federal regulations as well as municipal by-law infractions.

Why is it a lay bench?

- Justices of the Peace are considered to be a "lay bench." Justices of the peace are chosen to reflect the cultural diversity of the communities they serve. They do not necessarily have a law degree, though many do. They are experienced, community-minded members of the community. Like a jury of peers, a lay bench connects the community to the justice system.
- Justices of the Peace are highly trained and qualified professionals who were also actively involved in their own community before being appointed to the bench. That spirit of community service is important to the role.

Who can be a Justice of the Peace and how are they appointed?

- The Ministry of the Attorney General appoints members to bench. The Justice of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee receives and evaluates applications.
- Justices of the Peace must demonstrate a high-level of analytical and decision-making skills, practical judgement, and a commitment to their community. They come from a wide variety of professional backgrounds and experiences, although many tend to come from the legal profession. In general, they will have at least 10 years of work experience and a post-secondary education.
- A Justice of the Peace must demonstrate a broad range of qualities and skills, beyond intellectual abilities, including the ability to keep an open mind, be impartial and demonstrate sound judgment. It also requires strong communication skills, compassion and the highest level of integrity.

Do Justice of the Peace get legal training?

- Justices of the Peace receive extensive training from the Ontario Court of Justice. It includes intensive sessions related to specific legal matters such as bail, search and seizure, provincial offences trials and how to interpret legal principles.
- In addition, mentoring and observing court proceedings with an experienced colleague helps Justices of the Peace apply their real-world, community experience to the court room. Justices of the Peace bench build and maintain professional skills, and social and cultural awareness, through continuous education and required annual programs.