

1. *Stop press – Commons debate on legal aid on Thursday, 12th July 2007******

The Government has announced that there will be a debate in the Commons to discuss the Constitutional Affairs Committee's concerns about the Carter Review of Legal Aid.

In a press release, the Chairman of the Committee the Alan Beith MP said:

“There is still huge concern in the legal profession and the not-for-profit sector about the effect of the Government's reforms on access to justice for the most vulnerable people: it is the poor who are likely to suffer most if the reforms go ahead with their predicted effects.

The Government's response to my Committee's report [for info see below] on the reforms has not met many of these concerns and we have secured a debate on 12 July to put further pressure on Ministers to rethink the reforms.”

This debate is extremely important not least because it provides us with an opportunity to show to the new ministerial team (see below) the strength of opposition to these proposals.

IN LIGHT OF THIS ALL MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO:

- Contact their constituency MPs before this debate (for email and other contact details see <http://www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm>);
- Ask their MPs to confirm that they are intending to attend the debate;
- Provide them with a copy of HLPAs Housing Justice Campaign booklet (which is attached to this email) which explains the issues to them (all MPs will be receiving a glossy version of the booklet direct from HLPAs at the beginning of next week, however MPs will tend to take approaches directly from concerned constituents far more seriously than approaches from lobby and campaign groups).
- You may also want to point out to them that the government's response to the DCA Select Committee's report (see below) shows an astonishing contempt for Parliament at a time when Gordon Brown has indicated he attempts to restore Parliamentary scrutiny of the executive (a point which may encourage MPs not traditionally interested in legal aid to take an interest).
- If you do nothing else to try to save legal aid please do this.

2. Other Information

Ministerial changes at the Ministry of Justice

Jack Straw is Secretary of State and Lord Chancellor. Lord Hunt of Kings Heath is Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for Legal Aid. Lord Hunt's background is in NHS administration. Maria Eagle MP, a former solicitor, is also a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and her responsibilities include “support to Lord Hunt on legal aid”.

Government's response to Constitutional Affairs Committee Report

Shortly before the new ministerial team took over, the government's response to the Select Committee's highly critical report is found here <http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/legal-aid->

[reform.pdf](#). The government's response disputes all the committee's criticisms and indicates that no changes will be made to the proposed reforms.

Specialist support

On 18th June 2007 the LSC put out for consultation proposals for reshaping the specialist support services provided by Garden Court, Pump Court and Shelter amongst others – see http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/civil/docs_for_consultation/consultation_specialist_support.asp. Broadly the proposals seek to continue telephone support, but to end casework support and funding for training. The deadline for responses is 10th September 2007.

2. Campaigns

HLPAs Housing Justice Campaign

In addition to circulating the case studies and FAQs booklet to MPs, HLPAs revamped website with information about the campaign and the legal aid reforms is now up and running. More information will be added to the campaign pages over the coming weeks.

Contact details

For case study contributions please contact HLPAs lobbyist, Nowsheen Bhatti Nowsheen.Bhatti@shelter.org.uk.

For comments about or inclusion within this email update please contact Gareth Mitchell gmitchell@pierceglynnc.co.uk.