

Dear Colleague

Every election matters and as lawyers we believe in a safe, just and democratic society. The 2015 election has captivated legal aid lawyers like never before as we are now dependent upon the outcome to provide us with the best chance of stemming the tidal wave of cuts and court fees that stand in the way of ordinary people receiving access to justice.

Most criminal lawyers concerned about dual contracts can take heart from Labour's commitment to abandon the programme. By contrast we are told that the current government intend, "subject to review" , to introduce a further cut of 8.75%. Many of us are still struggling with the consequences of the first unnecessary and deeply damaging cut of last March which further compounded the effects of years of cuts in real terms.

We have witnessed firms closing, we have seen litigants being charged huge fees to take matters to court , and we note the government's desire to curb the ability to Judicially Review public bodies who make bad , unlawful decisions.

The consequence of this drive is that we will see access to justice removed from the high street and corralled into large warehouses where quality will be sacrificed for quantity.

For many parts of the country this will mean advice deserts and the dismantlement of the network of local access to justice as in addition to community based firms , advice centres and law centres have closed or will close.

The consequence will be a larger queue outside the MP's surgery. MPs already report that nearly 40% of their surgery cases now involve people who have no legal redress in court or who can't get a lawyer to represent them. An MP that supports the ongoing attack on the justice system is either unaware of the damage that is being caused to social cohesion and equality or is not one that understands the problems of ordinary people who often struggle with extraordinary problems.

We need to ensure that any candidate supportive of the current government's policy on funding access to justice is challenged on the campaign trail and ballot box. Your staff, your families and most importantly your clients will be affected by the decisions they make on May 7th.

We attach a pledge card setting out the basic elements for a fair and just society which we think any decent candidate should commit to. Please contact your local candidates and invite them to adopt the pledge card. Please ensure that a candidate signing the pledge card is then publicised through your local press and social media. The candidates need to know how important this issue is in such a close run campaign in key marginal seats like yours where a few hundred votes can make a huge difference.

If you are still fortunate to have a court house in your constituency, please take an hour on 27th April between 11.55-1pm to stand outside, inviting your local candidate to attend with the pledge card. This 65 minutes marks the 65 years that the nation has been served by legal aid.

Furthermore , it is vital that you attend the rally on 23rd April <https://www.lccsa.org.uk/vote-for-justice-rally-23042014/> where we will collectively let it be known that justice matters for a safe, just and democratic society, a phrase used, with no sense of irony, on the Ministry of Justice's own literature.

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