

## **Letter sent to The Times, for publication 10th January 2012**

Peers must consider carefully who stands to lose from the Government's proposed cuts to legal advice, as they are debated in the House of Lords today (Tuesday). Amongst others, 78,000 disabled people will no longer receive help with complex legal problems as a result of cuts to benefits advice, and 140 000 children will suffer as their parents are deemed ineligible for legal aid.

This 'law of everyday life' for issues such as benefits, debt, housing and employment is complex and legal, covered by dozens of lengthy statutes and hundreds of pages of guidance.

Legal aid is at the heart of successful community advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres, which either include legal aid within their own provision or refer clients on to nearby solicitors.

Advice on these issues saves the state money as it prevents problems escalating. Legal aid for civil justice does not - as Ken Clarke claims - encourage people to go to court. In fact, over 90% of legal help cases are resolved before they get that far.

Peers from all parties have expressed their unease over the cuts to advice for social welfare law. We urge them to protect legal aid where it matters most - to people on low incomes struggling with complex and serious problems, unable to resolve them without specialist help.

Amanda Ariss, Chief Executive, Equality and Diversity Forum  
Geraldine Blake, Chief Executive, Community Links  
Ailsa Bosworth, Chief Executive, National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society  
Katie Brown and Connor Johnston, Co-chairs, Young Legal Aid Lawyers  
Shami Chakrabarti, Director, Liberty  
Elizabeth Clarson, Chief Executive, Housing for Women  
Sophie Corlett, Head of External Relations, Mind  
Jue Frangos, Communications Officer, Open University Law Society  
Alison Garnham, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group  
Mark Goldring, Chief Executive, Mencap  
Gillian Guy, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice  
Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive, Scope  
Ruth Hayes, Chair, Law Centres Federation  
Des Hudson, Chief Executive, Law Society  
Steve Hynes, Chief Executive, Legal Action Group  
Sarah Jackson, Chief Executive, Working Families  
Cathy James, Chief Executive, Public Concern at Work  
Steve Johnson, Chief Executive, Advice UK  
Ann Lewis, Director, Advice Services Alliance  
Rachel Maskel, National Officer, Unite  
Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director, Age UK  
Rev Leo Osborn, President of the Methodist Church  
Habib Rahman, Chief Executive of Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants  
Barbara Rayment, Director, Youth Access  
Campbell Robb, Chief Executive, Shelter  
Frieda Schicker, Director, London Gypsy and Traveller Unit  
Emma Scott, Director, Rights of Women  
Mike Smith, Chief Executive, Livability

Carol Storer, Director, Legal Aid Practitioners Group  
Michael Todd QC, Chairman of the Bar  
Fraser Whitehead, Chairman of the Society of Labour Lawyers