



Justice deserves Lib Dems stay changes to legal aid: Testimonials

This document contains statements from signatories to our open letter to Nick Clegg. It explains how these proposals will particularly affect their organisations and those who they represent and support. We call on Nick Clegg to honour the motion passed at

the Liberal Democrat conference and stay these proposals now.

The Justice Alliance was formed in June of this year. We aim to bring together as many groups as possible who oppose the Government's plans for legal aid and to campaign together.

1. Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform represents children and young people in prison. We have a free advice line and specialist lawyers to provide legally aided assistance to those who need it. Each year we get hundreds of requests for help. Almost one third are from young people who have nowhere to live on release from prison and will end up in exactly the same place they were in when they offended. Others need help with access to courses to make sure they don't offend again. All of this important work will be cut from legal aid altogether on 2 December 2013.

2. Liberty

UK justice should be open to all, with everyone having the opportunity to refute an accusation of criminal behaviour, challenge treatment by the state, or enforce their rights and freedoms in court. Liberty believes cuts to legal aid will make it harder for many poor and vulnerable individuals to have their voice heard in complex and serious legal processes. The Government has an obligation to ensure that the law applies equally to everyone; the proposed cuts are a dereliction of that duty and will have consequences for the whole of society, not just those directly affected.

3. Justice

In JUSTICE's view the proposals in Transforming legal aid are ill-considered, rushed and unsupported by evidence. They will undermine the rule of law and significantly restrict access to justice and the right to an effective defence for individuals without independent means. Proposals to restrict eligibility for prisoners and persons with less than 12 months' lawful residence are inconsistent with the rights to equal treatment and equal protection of the law. Moreover, restricting access to judicial review could undermine its long-standing constitutional role of preventing arbitrary exercise of State power. We agree with Lord Neuberger, delivering this year's JUSTICE Annual Lecture: "Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments. So is the rule of law without access to the courts."

4. Amnesty International UK

Amnesty International believes the Government's proposed cuts to legal aid and restrictions to judicial review constitute an unprecedented threat to accessing justice.

Access to justice is the very cornerstone of any civilised society and these new proposals could decimate that access for the most vulnerable people.

Amnesty believes the cuts will hit the most vulnerable in the country the hardest and mean government bodies would be less accountable for their actions.

This is also a false economy as, rather than saving significant sums, the Government is likely to place great strain on the courts with yet more desperate people trying to represent themselves. We are asking the Government to urgently reconsider these proposals.

7. Legal Aid Practitioners Group

In April 2013 the LASPO Act came into force. Although the Government's own prediction was that several hundred thousand people would no longer receive advice and representation, the figures for new cases is even lower than anticipated, with exceptional case funding extremely rare. Now the proposals for a residence test – a test which many believe to be unlawful – will ensure that many potential clients who have to satisfy the test will be unable to do so because they will not be able to produce the relevant evidence, eg, many vulnerable people do not have a passport or the ability to gather the evidence to satisfy the test.

5. London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association (LCCSA)

The LCCSA fear that legal aid cuts will lead to a two-tier justice system where those without large disposable incomes will be deprived of lawyers able to carry out their professional duties diligently and expeditiously. Those on middle incomes risk losing their livelihoods as they are forced to find the funds to clear their names, whereas those on low incomes will be forced to travel large distances in order to see lawyers who are forced by economics to deliver cut price justice.

8. Unite the Union

Unite the Union has members across the legal and advice sector, and our members are increasingly concerned that the provision of services is threatened as never before. The Government has made major attacks on the services provided to our communities and Unite will continue to fight to ensure that legal aid remains a key part of the welfare state on behalf of all our members and the whole of society.

6. Criminal Bar Association (CBA)

The CBA remains concerned that the Government is still proposing to introduce an arbitrary exclusionary test which, by definition, discriminates against a whole class of people – immigrants – those recently arrived/resident in the country as well as all those who cannot provide documentary evidence to prove 12 months' residence in the UK. The proposals will still discriminate against the most vulnerable in the country who have legitimate need to access justice. This will include children excluded from home, the homeless, those with mental health difficulties, persons held at immigration centres and those British citizens out of the country (including those lawfully or unlawfully detained abroad).

Furthermore for trial work, which occupies most of the time of criminal barristers, the cuts are swingeing. Their true cumulative effect is that, across the board from shoplifting to murder, the fees payable would be reduced in amount by 26% from 2007 to date. To that should be added a reckoning for inflation, which is rising. The product is that the proposals, with those already introduced, reduce actual fee income for this work in real terms by 41%. There is no demonstrable need further to cut the very low rates for advocacy under the VHCC scheme and that by doing so both the quality and, more importantly, the supply of appropriate advocacy services will be badly affected, probably immediately on implementation.

9. MIND

Mind is deeply concerned about the impact of legal aid cuts upon people with mental health problems, who experience high levels of discrimination and some of whom may be at risk of compulsory detention and treatment under the MHA 1983 if they do not receive the community care and support they need. The proposals will have a disproportionate effect upon our beneficiaries as they include people who may not have the resources or capacity to act as litigants in person. Mind is concerned that in a climate of increasing cuts to public services, which people with mental health problems often need to access, the Government's reforms severely restrict the ability of individuals to challenge bad decision-making.

12. The Children's Society

The residence test if implemented will leave thousands of vulnerable refugee, migrant and trafficked children and young people without access to justice and at risk of destitution, exploitation and abuse. We work with many unaccompanied young people as well as families who are homeless and without support, for whom legal aid is a lifeline in securing access to vital support and services which they are entitled to. Without it they would be powerless to challenge unlawful decisions by powerful bodies such as local authorities, the police and the Home Office.

10. Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS)

PCS members are proud to work in a justice system that is respected the world over. We are concerned that changes to legal aid threaten this reputation as it will deny access to justice to the people who need it most.

The removal of £350m from the £914m annual civil and family legal aid budget is already having a devastating impact – affecting one in four of those previously eligible for civil legal aid.

This crude cost-cutting exercise, together with court closures and job losses, will leave our courts in chaos and provide justice only to those who can afford it.

13. Refugee Children's Consortium

The cuts to civil legal aid will impact directly on the lives of refugee, migrant and trafficked children and make it even more difficult for them to get the protection and support that they need. These children are some of the most vulnerable in the UK, and they will be unable to get help and uphold their rights when they are let down by the system. For a homeless teenager wrongly denied support, a newly recognised refugee who is mistreated, or a child with special educational needs in an undocumented family there will be no access to justice.

11. National Association of Probation Officers (Napo)

Napo the trade union for probation and family court staff has serious concerns about the impact of legal aid cuts and the increase in litigants in person in family court proceedings.

We are receiving many reports about the additional pressures caused on Cafcass caseworkers who are doing their best to bring some semblance of order between often fractious parties who are themselves placed in a stressful situation due to their inability to engage specialist legal advice.

The consequent loss of taxpayers' money in adjourned hearings and delays caused by excessive workloads outweighs the relatively modest sums that would have been spent in terms of access to legal aid.

Napo fully supports the Justice Alliance efforts to reverse the secretary of state's ill-conceived and vindictive policies.

14. Helen Bamber Foundation

The proposed cuts to legal aid will have the effect of reducing it to an emergency-only service. This will dramatically and unnecessarily reduce the ability of those who have suffered human rights abuses to access appropriate justice. As a result, some of the most vulnerable people in our society will be harmed further and will suffer more. It would be shameful if the coalition government implemented these cuts.

15. Reprieve

Reprieve is concerned that the Justice Secretary's proposed cuts to the legal aid system will severely damage the public's ability to hold the Government to account, strengthening the state at the expense of the citizen. In particular, the 'residence test' which Mr Grayling proposes for legal aid would lead to a range of deserving cases being denied justice – past examples including Libyan victims of rendition and torture at the hands of Gaddafi and MI6; Binyam Mohamed, a British resident who faced a potential death sentence based on 'evidence' extracted through torture; and Afghan interpreters who worked for UK Armed Forces seeking asylum.

18. Criminal Law Solicitors Association

The call from Government has been that everyone must take their share of cuts. No one is immune.

As any legal aid lawyer knows we have taken our share of cuts. We have taken cuts for years when others saw only increases.

We have been so brutally cut that, there is simply no more to cut. Firms will not and cannot cope with any further cuts. We are on the eve of destruction.

16. Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers

We oppose the legal aid cuts because they are an ideological attack on access to justice for all but the richest in our society. Legal aid is a key component of the welfare state.

These cuts, coming on top of existing cuts under this government and the last, are unsustainable. They will:

- (i) make it impossible for lawyers to specialise in legal aid work;
- (ii) limit judicial review so that the state cannot be held to account for its unlawful actions; and
- (iii) create a worrying incentive for lawyers to pressure their clients to plead guilty.

19. Public Law Project

The legal aid changes are a threat to our constitutional settlement. They undermine access to justice, Government accountability and equality before the law. They are based on misinformation that misleads the public into thinking there are problems where there are none. The cuts appear to be driven by the Government's self-interest in avoiding checks on its power: the result will be that public bodies like local authorities, hospitals, schools and the police, as well as all Government departments, will be able to act with impunity, safe in the knowledge that ordinary people will not be able to challenge their unreasonable, unfair or unlawful decisions.

17. The Law Centres Network

The Law Centres Network strongly opposes further restrictions to legal aid as they will damage the very fabric of our justice system. Imposing a residence test for legal aid will create a separate law for new migrants, denying vulnerable and disadvantaged people equal access to courts and a fair trial, and weakening equality before the law. Curtailing access to Judicial Review will impair an important check on public authority. It will cause injustice by denying people their right to effective remedy and, by letting public bodies act with impunity, will weaken the rule of law.

20. Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary are strongly opposed to the proposed legal aid cuts and have spoken out, at the debate at our conference, demonstrating how money can be saved by ending indefinite detention.

We welcome the concessions already made but regret that these do not include such as the ability for redress against injustice, abuse whilst in detention, and needing to prove certain status (ie those trafficked) in many cases.

We are deeply concerned about the impact on the very vulnerable who are seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Access to justice is a cornerstone of fairness for all.

21. Coram Children's Legal Centre

The cuts to legal aid will damage access to justice for all and will harm the welfare of thousands of children, including those in very vulnerable situations. Any child who can't show documents to prove their status will be cut off from civil legal aid entirely, leaving them without access to help to solve their problems and realise their rights. The cuts will hit trafficked children, disabled children and children in families who are destitute. Children and young people in prison won't get to see a lawyer to deal with many of the complex issues they face. The protections provided to children in law are meaningless if they can't be enforced.

24. INQUEST

Specialist legal aid lawyers are vital in assisting bereaved families to hold the State to account following deaths in prison and police custody in cases such as Jimmy Mubenga, Ian Tomlinson, Sean Rigg, Jean Charles de Menezes, and James Herbert. Inquests regularly return verdicts strongly critical of the state. The attack on legal aid will undermine the ability to hold the state to account, remove proper public scrutiny of what takes place behind the closed walls of custodial institutions, leave wrongdoing unchallenged and prevent important changes to poor and dangerous practices by the state. The abuses of power uncovered at many of these inquests would remain hidden from public view.

22. Criminal Appeal Lawyers Association

The Government's proposals threaten to undermine the fabric of the criminal justice system in such a way as to increase the risk of miscarriages of justice. Already a significant proportion of complaints from convicted defendants, both to the Criminal Cases Review Commission and to those who specialise in criminal appeals, raise criticism of their legal representation at trial. An already overstretched and under resourced criminal defence provision cannot sustain further cost cutting without it having a significant impact on the quality of service. This is exacerbated by the deliberate provision of a financial incentive to lawyers to advise early guilty pleas which will undermine the solicitor-client relationship.

25. Prisoners' Advice Service (PAS)

The Prisoners' Advice Service provides free legal advice and representation to prisoners in England and Wales. PAS runs an advice line and responds to approximately 8,000 letters and 15,000 calls from prisoners per year.

PAS is deeply concerned about the legal aid cuts in prison law, as they will severely affect prisoners' access to justice. Legal aid in this field has through the years allowed prisoners to challenge the actions of prison authorities and ensure oversight and protection of their rights by the courts. If the proposed cuts go ahead, prisoners' rights will soon be lost behind a cell door.

23. Association of Prison Lawyers

The Association of Prison Lawyers represents 360 members.

The Government justifies the cuts to funding in prison law cases on grounds of cost and public confidence/credibility in the scheme. The projected savings from prison law cuts is £4m. Children and vulnerable adults in custody will no longer have access to legal advice.

Each prison place costs £40,000pa. There are over 85,000 prisoners. The removal of legal advice will result in prisoners spending longer in jail and further endanger public safety, costing the taxpayer far more than the amount the MOJ aim to save. The secretary of state told the Justice Select Committee that the cuts are ideological. It is far too dangerous to play politics with public safety and the rights of the vulnerable.

26. Just for Kids Law

Just for Kids Law are very concerned that the proposed cuts to legal aid will leave children homeless and destitute. For example, one of our clients is currently destitute, as the local authority social services team has failed to provide her with the support she is lawfully entitled to. She requires a legal aid lawyer to challenge social services so that she can obtain accommodation and support. With the introduction of the residence test, she would no longer be eligible for legal aid. She would remain homeless and destitute. She is just one of many children in similar circumstances for whom the impact of these cuts would be devastating.

27. Communication Workers Union (CWU)

This government is erecting barriers to justice for ordinary people. Cutting legal aid hits those already least able to access the legal system. The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' continues to widen and we will end up with a severely polarised society with your rights based on your ability to pay – instead of your need. This is neither healthy nor right. With criticism from the Law Society and the Bar and Treasury Counsel this cut is wrong, reaffirming the belief that this Government exists to serve the better off in society ignoring the needs of ordinary people.

28. Young Legal Aid Lawyers

These cuts are not about saving money. They are about ideology. They will deny migrants and prisoners the protection of the law. They will undermine the ability of citizens to hold the state to account. And they will lead to the closure of many high street firms. Contrary to the rhetoric, these cuts will not affect so-called "fat cat" lawyers. They are far more likely to impact on junior solicitors and barristers, saddled with large student debts, working hard for relatively little in the way of remuneration. In our most recent survey of our members, 50% of respondents working in the legal aid sector were earning less than £20,000 per annum. This is the group that will be hit by these cuts and social mobility and diversity in the legal profession will suffer, as will the quality of the service which we work hard to provide to our clients.

29. Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)

Members of the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association are experts in immigration law but even we don't see how the residence test will work. Like GPs, we don't think service providers should act as immigration officers. A residence test or making it harder to get legal aid for judicial review won't stop people going to court. But they will do it alone which will increase costs long term. There are better ways to save money, for example, sorting out the systemic failings and endemic delays in the Home Office, improving its conduct as a litigant and getting it to implement decisions of the court. Most importantly, this is about justice. There must be a level playing field for anyone up against the state.

30. The Justice Gap

The Justice Gap was set up in 2011 as a recognition that the system isn't working; that many people struggle to secure 'access to justice' – not just vulnerable sections of the community or those without money.

We oppose the proposed further cuts to legal aid because they will result in fewer and fewer people being able to access justice and enforce their legal rights. The Justice Gap will widen if these cuts are implemented.

31. Legal Action Group (LAG)

Legal Action Group is independent of the providers and funders legal advice services. Our primary concern is that the public have access to good quality advice and representation.

We believe that the loss of funding for advice in many cases which involve everyday legal problems will lead to problems escalating. This will ultimately create more costs for the state and greater distress for people unable to get early assistance with their legal problems. In criminal legal aid, there is already evidence that the constant pressure on fees is leading to poor quality work. Further reductions risk increased miscarriages of justice, which undermine the rule of law.

32. Asylum Aid

Further legal aid cuts will be catastrophic for people who most need access to justice. This includes victims of rape and torture, and people who have been trafficked here to be exploited daily.

They need quality legal advice – but the cuts threaten to strip away the expert help and representation which still just about exists.

The Government can reduce its legal aid bill by improving the quality of asylum decisions. Charities have demanded this for years. So too, now, has the Home Affairs Committee. The current plan, to ignore these failings and insulate departments from challenge, is wholly unacceptable.

33. The Detention Forum

Every day, the UK detains thousands of migrants indefinitely in detention centres and prisons. They are incarcerated for the administrative convenience of the state. Many are highly vulnerable. The residence test will deny them access to legal advice and representation when they want to challenge abuses by the state. Justice that is only available for some is no justice at all. The residence test must be dropped if we are to protect the rule of law in this country.

36. Kent Refugee Help

Kent Refugee Help is concerned about the impact of the legal aid cuts on immigration detainees. A young man held indefinitely in prison after completion of his sentence for a minor offence went on hunger strike. He was determined to die, despairing of ever being released as his embassy could not obtain a travel document to deport him. A legal aid lawyer took his case to fight his unlawful detention and this saved his life. LASPO has already had a severe impact on the number of legal aid solicitors doing this specialist work and the current proposals will worsen the situation. We fear for the safety of those we help.

34. Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC)

Given the wide ranging attacks against disabled people by the coalition government access to legal aid has been vital in allowing many of these to be challenged. Disabled people have through the use of legal aid, been able to challenge several aspects of new legislation which would have restricted their right to live independently in the community and forced them back into residential care homes. This includes the judgement that closing the Independent Living Fund is unlawful which was a challenge funded by legal aid.

37. Netpol

We are a group of lawyers who specialise in challenging police powers in relation to protest and in the community. We see first-hand the difficulties clients have in defending themselves against allegations made by the police and in seeking to hold them to account for misconduct. Quality representation in criminal cases will be greatly undermined by the perverse incentives proposed. This will inevitably lead to miscarriages of justice. The proposals regarding judicial review will allow the state to make unlawful decisions unchecked where the issues are complex or unpopular, such as when considering the use of public order powers.

35. Just Rights

Just Rights is a coalition of organisations who believe that children and young people are a uniquely vulnerable client group with advice needs and advice-seeking behaviour. We are deeply concerned that the current proposed changes to legal aid, combined with the impact of LASPO Act, will have a devastating effect on children and young people, and raises serious child protection issues.

Young people such as Ciara, aged 16 and a care leaver, who had experienced severe domestic violence, would, under the new judicial review proposals, have been unable to challenge the failure of her local authority to assess her needs and provide her with the support she needed.

38. Defend the Right to Protest

Since the IPCC has no powers to rule that police have acted unlawfully, judicial review or a civil claim are the only means by which protesters can challenge ill-treatment or injury at the hands of the police. When Susanna Mengesha was kettled at a demonstration, police would only allow her to leave if she gave her name, address, date of birth and agreed to be filmed. At a judicial review in 2013, Lord Justice Moses ruled that 'It was not lawful for the police to maintain the containment for the purposes of obtaining identification, whether by questioning or by filming.'

39. Tamils Against Genocide

Although Tamils Against Genocide does not receive legal aid funding, we observe that the cuts which have been made and proposed prevent solicitors from obtaining proper expert assessments of victims of torture and war crimes. The number of solicitors providing quality legal representation for victims of torture and war crimes has been significantly reduced. This has had an impact on victims of torture and war crimes obtaining asylum status in the UK and obtaining justice in the UK using universal jurisdiction principles. It is distressing to see that the cuts to legal aid have in part assisted negative decisions being made in asylum claims for which a different outcome could have been made if the solicitors had the legal aid funding to assist the asylum seekers, victims of torture and war crimes. The result of the cuts has been the return of Tamils back to Sri Lanka where they face a significant risk of being tortured. The cuts have disproportionately affected the Tamil community in the UK as none of the Tamil solicitors are able to provide any assistance under the legal aid scheme anymore and this has seriously hampered the Tamil community's access justice.

40. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

I recently attended a pre-CSW meeting put on by the GEO (Government Equalities Office). The speaker for DfID said that they, 'helped 6.5 million women to access justice through the courts, police and legal assistance.' So I asked the question as to what they were going to do after legal aid is eviscerated as seems to be the plan of this non-lawyer Justice Secretary. He did not have an answer but said that his department (he was not from DfID) was writing to the Justice Secretary about his concerns.

41. Black Activists Rising Against Cuts (BARAC) UK

BARAC UK is opposed to cuts to legal aid because they will impact disproportionately on Black (BME) communities barring their access to justice. Because of race discrimination black people are over represented in all aspects of the criminal justice system and under represented when victims of crime. Institutional racism in the police forces and other aspects of the public sector is increasing with young black people in particular targeted for police harassment and brutality. The con-dem programme of cuts is amplifying racism for black and migrant workers, service users and communities and black and migrant communities are being scape-goated. Racism in the labour market and wider society as well as the disproportionate impact of cuts is deepening poverty making access to justice inaccessible which in turn leads to a rise in racism and injustice. Justice should not be a privilege for the rich but accessible to all especially those who are the biggest victims of poverty, discrimination, crime and injustice.

42. Canterbury and Whitstable Stop the Cuts Group

The proposed cuts to legal aid are a profound attack on welfare provision. In Canterbury and Whitstable we have successfully defended our youth club, the Job Centre and through the process of judicial review retained a minor injuries unit at our local hospital. Now 23 children's centres are marked for closure and Kent County Council plan to make further cuts worth £240 million. We believe that the proposal to drastically limit legal aid for judicial review means that it will be very difficult to hold the state to account.

43. Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)

JCWI represents some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in the country – migrants, some who have little understanding of the UK's judicial process. At present we are representing a 19 year old who is facing deportation who would otherwise be expected to cross examine police officers and his own mother to stand any chance of stopping his own deportation. This appears to us to be more than a step back in legal provision, but a step back through the ages to a time where justice is available to the more privileged and educated in society. It is positively medieval.

44. Hackney Community Law Centre

Hackney Law Centre has already curtailed its services to the public due to the implementation of LASPO in April 2013. For example, we can no longer advise cancer sufferers who have failed their ATOS assessments and are deemed capable of working on their appeals. Ms. X a mum with limited leave to remain in the UK but no recourse to public funds would be denied the access to justice which enabled us to settle her judicial review application on service of Counsel's publicly funded advice on the local authority which demonstrated the risk her family faced if destitute. We would not be paid for a such cases should the proposals to only pay for successful judicial review cases after permission has been granted become law.

47. Women against rape

If legal aid is cut: Ms A could not have sued police for losing evidence of her rape. Ms B could not have judicially reviewed the CPS which dropped her rape prosecution. Ms C who suffered domestic violence, could not have got a non-molestation order, she would have lost her kids and been deported. Other vulnerable rape victims would be unable to take action. Thousands of vulnerable women and children would be prevented from holding the authorities to account, and denied justice and protection, leaving perpetrators free to attack again.

45. Detention Action

Justice must be for everyone, or it is no justice. The residence test will exclude some of the most vulnerable people in the country from justice. It will create a class of people who can be abused with impunity. They will still have rights, but will be unable to access them. They will have no redress if they are abused in detention or unlawfully made homeless. Unlawfully detained migrants who qualify for legal aid will find no solicitors to represent them because judicial review work will be financially unviable. There is no rule of law if the law is inaccessible.

48. Black Women's Rape Action

Every day we see how legal aid cuts are denying protection and justice to survivors of rape and other sexual violence, compounding the racism and sexism they face in pursuing their cases. UKBA regularly flouts its guidelines in refusing their claims. Further cuts (the residence test and for judicial review) will make it impossible to challenge these life and death decisions. Ms J won family reunion with her children using Judicial Review to end a devastating 10-year delay in granting her refugee status. As she says, 'which mother would not want her children to be safe with her?'

46. Southall Black Sisters

The Residence Test will prevent many destitute women and children fleeing an abusive environment from exercising their legal rights. Without legal aid, Raheena would have been unable to challenge an unlawful decision by the UK Border Agency to refuse her application to remain in the UK on the basis of domestic violence. Without legal aid, Raheena would have been unable to challenge an unlawful decision by Social Services to assist only her daughter and leave her homeless and destitute. Without legal aid, Raheena would have been faced with a stark choice of either returning to Ethiopia with her daughter or face deportation and the loss of her child to an abusive husband or to the local authority. Without legal aid, be afraid.

49. Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC)

CAMPACC is extremely concerned about the loss of legal aid for; appeals against deportation (aid only allowed where article 3 of ECHR, regarding potential torture, is at issue); civil cases brought against police, prison staff or immigration detention/removal personnel; and cases concerning abuse of authority or connivance with ill-treatment by UK agents where the plaintiff is not resident (e.g. Binyamin Mohamed). We consider it vital that legal aid should continue to be available to challenge deportation to countries where the deportee could not obtain a fair trial, and also to challenge violence at the hands of the UK authorities.

50. Islington Law Centre

Islington Law Centre is particularly concerned about the issues of the residence test and the changes to judicial review. We think that the impact of the residence test will be to lead to greater exploitation of tenants by unscrupulous landlords, as many tenants (including British Citizens) simply do not have documentary proof of their citizenship and will not be able to get legal aid to maintain a safe roof above their head. The ability to bring a judicial review is vital to ensure equality of arms before the law for all citizens, regardless of income.

51. Unite LE 785 (Advice and Legal Workers Branch)

Our members have watched with real concern as the last round of legal aid cuts have denied access to justice in many areas of law. The introduction of a residence test will tie our members up in further bureaucracy and will result in them having to, for example, fundraise for the cost of passports for low income households in order that they can get legal aid in order to prevent homelessness. It is vital that there is not one law for the rich and another for the poor, and the changes will have the effect of meaning that there is no remedy against illegal action taken against vast numbers of ordinary members of the public.

52. Police Action Lawyers Group

We oppose these proposals because they will greatly reduce the ability of our clients, victims of misconduct by the police and other detaining authorities, to hold the state to account. Our clients are often exceptionally vulnerable and victims of some of the most severe abuses of power. Their cases affect not just themselves, but highlight how the state conducts itself, and therefore benefit society as a whole. We are particularly concerned about the proposals regarding judicial review and the residence test. The latter we regard as racist, and will allow the state to abuse immigrants with impunity.

53. Justice for Women

Two women detained at different times at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre were allegedly sexually assaulted by male staff employed by Yarl's Wood. Their cases were featured in the Observer newspaper that exposed the scandal of sex abuse at Yarl's Wood. They know of other women who have been similarly abused at Yarl's Wood.

The Government wants to remove legal aid from people who don't pass the residence test and this would apply to these women. This would mean that they would never have had assistance from a lawyer to challenge the investigations conducted by Serco and UKBA, to seek redress for the harm done and to help bring these issues to public awareness. Without legal aid lawyers it is much less likely that the authorities would be held to account.

The Liberal Democrats were instrumental in ending the detention of children in Yarl's Wood and it was partly as a result of legal aid lawyers that the harm caused to children in detention was brought to the public's attention. As the deputy prime minister, we ask you to ensure that the human rights of all, including those detained, are protected.

54. Save Justice

We at Save Justice think that it cannot be disputed that the proposed changes to legal aid and judicial review would substantially alter the UK justice system. We do not think that such wide-reaching changes should be brought into effect without proper parliamentary debate. Furthermore, we are strongly of the view that these proposals are at odds with the avowed concerns and aspirations of Liberal Democrats. To have been responsible for making the UK less equal, less democratic, its people less powerful and its Government less accountable is a toxic legacy indeed. We urge you to avoid it.

55. Medical Justice

Medical Justice works with survivors of torture and trafficking, and mentally and physically ill people in detention. Our clients are among the most vulnerable, but are detained without time limit, with limited judicial oversight, frequently receive inadequate medical care, and have very few means of having their complaints addressed.

The few safeguards there are, such as policies not to detain victims of torture or seriously mentally ill people, are not effective in practice – with devastating consequences for the individuals. The proposed legal-aid cuts would take away the one effective tool detainees have to accessing justice and ensuring accountability.

56. Yarl's Wood Befrienders

'Three detention officers sacked after sexual contact with vulnerable detainee.'
'Unlawfully detained at Yarl's Wood weeks after leaving a secure mental health ward – refugee seeks compensation to rebuild her life in the UK.'

Beaten, bleeding – then returned in a wheelchair. Detainee wins compensation after assault by G4S officers.'

'Woman settles out of court after alleged sexual assault by nurse.'

'Payout for refugee: she was rushed to hospital a day after detention doctors insisted there was nothing wrong with her.'

All headlines we will never see again if the Legal Aid proposals go ahead.

Be afraid without Legal Aid.

59. Migrants' Rights Network

At a time when the Government has declared its intention to create a 'hostile environment' for migrants in the UK a robust legal aid system is needed to prevent injustice. Yet the cuts have meant a drastic loss of capacity to provide assistance to vulnerable migrants across a whole range of complex areas of Home Office regulations, including, in anything other than in asylum cases, in appealing adverse decisions before the immigration appeal tribunals. Risk to migrants now proliferates across the system, and the cuts mean we have less capacity to provide effective redress.

57. Refugee Youth

We are Refugee Youth, a community of young people from all over the world who are now living in the UK. We come from many different backgrounds; most of us are refugees or still in the process of seeking asylum. Many of us came to the UK without family. The proposed cuts to legal aid would put a lot of young refugees in danger because we don't understand the systems.

'If I hadn't had that Legal Aid I don't know what I would have done. I didn't have a penny to pay for a lawyer and if I had to represent myself I would have no idea what evidence to provide.' Young member of Refugee Youth, 19, Eritrea

60. Churches Refugee Network

The Churches Refugee Network is in association with the ecumenical Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Its steering committee membership represents support work with migrants and asylum seekers across the voluntary sector, both legal and social, and religious. We are very critical of the proposed changes to legal aid and to judicial review.

Despite poor decision making by the Home Office, Court and Tribunals being the cause of many asylum and immigration JRs funded by legal aid, nothing is proposed to address this.

As for the small number of JRs brought by interest groups, the Government admits these have a higher success rate than those brought by individuals. This should be an incentive to improve processes and access to justice. Instead the proposals will undermine the constitutional role of JR. It is crucial in public law that someone can hold decision-makers to account. Cases of gross injustice may not be able to be redressed unless a challenge can be brought by an NGO, charity, faith group, or campaigning group

58. All African Women's Group

As women seeking asylum or with other immigration cases, we are already suffering terribly because of legal aid cuts. Over half of us are destitute because we don't have money to pay private lawyers. We don't even have enough to eat. UKBA disbelieves and refuses our cases. With the residency test and cut to legal aid for judicial review, UKBA will be able to deport us no matter how life-threatening it is for us and our children.

61. Unite Against Fascism

Legal aid is vitally important for the poor and marginalised and also for those who are principled. Over the decades, hundreds of anti-Fascists have been arrested on demonstrations where their only aim has been to oppose those who seek to sow race hatred and foment violence in our communities. Without the advice and support of dedicated lawyers, many could have ended up with convictions and criminal records.

62. Rene Cassin

René Cassin draws upon Jewish experience to promote and protect universal human rights, and as such is in a unique position to comment on the importance of access to justice, and consequently the proposed cuts to legal aid, for minority groups. The limitation on access to the legal system by the least privileged is at odds with a just and democratic society and in direct contravention with international and domestic law. The Jewish people have learned this lesson many times throughout our history. We believe that Government has underestimated the impact the cuts will have and we are particularly opposed to the proposals to introduce a residency test and the restrictions of funding for judicial review.

65. UNITED SIKHS

I am a pro bono charity lawyer with UNITED SIKHS and last year I saw how legal aid, as the lynchpin of the criminal justice system, moved the wheels of justice to protect the rights of a priest and many Sikh congregants, who had been picked up from Gurdwara premises by the police. I called a legal aid solicitor for help. That night legal aid defended the presumption of innocence.

63. Women for Refugee Women

We are very concerned about the impact that legal aid cuts will have and are already having on the vulnerable women with whom we work. Women who have sought asylum in the UK are typically survivors of extreme human rights abuses. While legal aid is theoretically still available for their asylum cases, in practice we are finding that there are fewer lawyers able to deal with their cases as a result of existing restrictions, which means that women are struggling to get a fair hearing. We are deeply concerned about the impact of further restrictions on their ability to challenge unfair decisions on their asylum cases or challenge denials of support and accommodation, or to bring perpetrators of abuse or violence to justice. These proposals will damage the lives of some of the most vulnerable women in our society.

66. South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group

As a group which includes many asylum seekers and refugees, we in the South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG) are very concerned that the cuts in legal aid will deny access to justice to migrants. The extent to which Home Office decision on asylum cases are overturned at tribunals shows that many of these initial decisions are erroneous. But we fear that the changes proposed by the Ministry of Justice will make it much more difficult for refused asylum seekers to gain access to legal advice. This could ultimately have very serious consequences. We are aware of asylum seekers being returned to countries where they suffer serious abuse. Access to legal help is vital if the UK is to fulfil its obligations under the 1951 Convention.

64. Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

The legal aid cuts are already having a hugely damaging effect on those held in immigration detention. Many of those we work with have survived torture, persecution, war and extreme poverty, with limited English and little understanding of the complexities of the legal system they find themselves entangled in. Access to free, good quality legal advice and representation are vital if they are to be allowed to exercise their right to present their cases in a proper manner. Our history and tradition of justice for all, particularly those most vulnerable, depends on this.

67. Wish – a voice for women’s mental health

WISH works with women with mental health needs in prison, psychiatric services and the community. Women are more at risk of having their children taken into care while in prison, as they are usually the primary care giver. Legal aid cuts will mean women in prison will find it harder to fight to gain access to their children. I am really dreading the next time a woman is wailing on my shoulder because she is losing contact with her children because of cuts to legal aid. Everyone should have equal access to justice and WISH is opposed to cuts in legal aid especially as women seem to be unfairly hit.

68. Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team (ASIRT)

ASIRT works with asylum seekers and irregular migrants, who are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of British society. Routinely, we see statutory bodies, such as the Home Office and Local Authority social service departments, disregarding our clients' rights and making decisions which fly in the face not only of legal precedent, but also of justice.

Denial of our service users' access to the courts will yet further entrench the social exclusion to which they are already subjected, helping to ensure the existence of an impoverished and alienated underclass in our inner cities.

71. Southwark Law Centre

Our client had worked in the UK for some years. She had a severe learning disability. She had been granted indefinite leave to remain (LTR) but had not then established '12 months' continuous lawful residence'. She applied for assistance as a homeless person but was turned away on the basis that she did not have a 'priority need' as her young child did not have LTR. This decision wrongly failed to have regard to her disability. Following a judicial review pre-action protocol letter interim accommodation was obtained. After medical evidence confirming her disability was submitted, the full housing duty was accepted.

We are concerned that homeless people, and in particular families will not be able to access the housing assistance they are entitled to. This will not save money but increase the financial burden on social services and on homeless charities.

69. Kalayaan

Ruby had been working as a full time live in domestic worker. Her work days averaged 16 hours; she was responsible for the 3 children, including a 10 month old, as well as keeping the house spotless, all the laundry and the cooking. She had been working 7 days a week. Her former employers were well known and wealthy yet paid her £50 a week. We explained to Ruby that even had she been earning the National Minimum Wage she would have been earning £707 a week for the hours she was doing. In the past Kalayaan were able to support workers in Ruby's position to take a claim to the Employment Tribunal. Legal aid cuts mean Ruby has no chance of doing this.

72. Rights of Women

Legal aid is a vital tool for the protection of women from violence. It enables a woman who is experiencing violence to protect herself and any children that she has by making applications for protective orders, securing safe accommodation, ending a violent relationship and if necessary, regularising her immigration status. Rights of Women's research indicates that users of civil legal aid view it as a life-saving resource that secures access to justice and safety.

70. Prisoners Penfriends

The combination of cuts both to the scope of prison law work and to lawyers' fees will have a serious impact on the isolated prisoners our volunteers try to support, many of whom our penfriends find to be educationally challenged and emotionally vulnerable, if not actually mentally ill. For these people, reduced access to lawyers and legal advice will lead to greater isolation and a build-up of confusion and resentment, which is likely to have a negative effect on their chances of rehabilitation and reintegration into the law-abiding community.

73. British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR)

The BIHR primarily works beyond the courtrooms, helping translate human rights laws into practice. However, ensuring recourse to the courts when needed is vital. Access to justice for everyone, not just the rich and powerful, is the hallmark of a civilised society. Legal aid helps make sure all people, not simply the rich, can hold those who break the rules to account. Yet recent reforms and proposals mean many, especially the most vulnerable, will be less able to seek justice. Leaving misuses of power and public finance unchecked is a very worrying path to be treading.

74. Freedom From Torture

Access to justice is an important element of the right to rehabilitation guaranteed to torture survivors by Article 14 of the UN Convention Against Torture.

Torture survivors are among the most vulnerable people in the UK. Many suffer from the consequences of torture for years after its infliction, with their rehabilitation impeded by poor Home Office quality decision-making on their protection claims and by their experiences of poverty in the UK during the asylum process.

The legal aid proposals will have a devastating impact on the ability of torture survivors to access the high quality legal advice they need to secure their right to protection as well as prohibit those recognised as refugees from bringing challenges to prevent homelessness and destitution through the lack of a seamless transition between the asylum support system and mainstream provision.

77. Baobab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile

Young refugees have suffered sequential abuses including experiences of violence and observations of humiliation and murder of their parents. Such events have long-term negative impacts on future psychological development. Poor assessments by social workers and immigration officers, contrary to UK and UN children's legislation guidance, lead to neglect of young people's developmental needs and rights. Suitable conditions for rehabilitation and recovery are not provided.

Possibilities for legal challenges safeguard vulnerable minors. Legal aid cuts would prevent challenges to poor practice of statutory agencies including SSD's, UKBA. We will be forced to be bystanders to neglect and abuse of vulnerable young people.

75. National Aids Trust (NAT)

NAT opposes the Government's policy to restrict access to legal aid. People living with HIV are disproportionately affected by poverty and are more likely to need to rely on legal aid in order to get legal advice on civil and criminal matters. In addition, people living with HIV in the UK are more likely than the general population to be found in two of the groups most affected by these proposals: migrants and prisoners. Finally, some people living with HIV face prosecution for 'reckless' or 'intentional' transmission of HIV to others. These cases are rare and not always well investigated. Expert legal advice is essential to prevent poor investigation and to uphold the rights and dignity of people living with HIV.

78. Society of Asian Lawyers

These reforms mark the return of the era of the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four as the quality and availability of legal representation disintegrates.

Diversity within the legal professions will be obliterated because smaller firms who do not have the capacity to bid for Duty Solicitor Contracts will be unable to survive on own client work alone.

(Law Society figures show that more than half of BME solicitors work in law firms of 5 partners or less.)

Such firms are more likely to instruct BME barristers with an understanding of their clients' needs. Their practises will disappear overnight.

The communities we serve will suffer because firms reflecting their background will no longer exist. Furthermore financially incentivising lawyers for advising clients to plead guilty is unconscionable.

76. Camden Community Law Centre

Camden Community Law Centre (CCLC) was established in 1973. We oppose the legal aid cuts because we were forced to reduce our services by approximately 70%. We have found it particularly challenging to manage our services since April 2013 and sometimes have to turn clients away. Our clients are typically facing issues such as eviction, deportation and racial discrimination which require specialist legal assistance. We now only have three full-time lawyers and one part-time caseworker as fee-earners. We rely on alternative sources of funding and volunteers to compensate.

We are pleased that Mr Hughes spoke about his commitment to legal aid and the legal aid profession on 1 November 2013. We ask that he positively uses his influence to effect change and also to create incentives for aspiring young legal aid lawyers.

79. Work Capability Assessment Action Group

Our broad-based action group is critical of the WCA. Its policy framework and misuse to harm and stigmatise disabled people. People affected need advice - but cuts in legal funding are denying this. Necessary challenges such as JR must be protected, where decisions and policies of government bodies lead to extreme hardship in cases and discrimination against minority groups. We need to work together as claimants, advocates, communities, advisers, lawyers, decision-makers and politicians to overcome obvious wrongs. Further punitive cuts in legal aid, including in criminal cases, should be resisted.

80. Miscarriages of Justice Organisation (MOJO)

Justice is already a lottery with the losers frequently facing miscarriages of justice. Justice based on economics is no justice at all. To further remove or restrict legal aid can only add to justice miscarrying. A right that requires to be purchased is not a right. The poor seem to be being asked to bear the burden of austerity in unequal measure with many safeguards established over many years being stripped away. If justice is blind then that should include a person's financial circumstance. Equality of arms can only be achieved by equality of resource.

81. The Crucible Centre for Human Rights Research, University of Roehampton

As the UK seeks to take up its place on the UN Human Rights Council, the Government has pledged its commitment to the 'protection of those most vulnerable in society', 'dignity for all', and to 'work tirelessly for the promotion and protection of human rights, both domestically and abroad'. Whilst making this commitment to the international community, the Government must show an equal commitment domestically. Proposals to restrict legal aid jeopardise the most fundamental of human rights - equal access to justice regardless of wealth or status - and undermines our international reputation for justice.

82. ECPAT UK

ECPAT UK, as a leading child rights organisation working on child trafficking and exploitation, has great concerns regarding the negative impact of the proposed changes on child victims of trafficking. The restrictions placed by the residence test would mean that child victims of trafficking would be left with very limited access to legal advice, with only aid in the form of immigration advice, employment advice or a damages claim being available to them. In addition, to classify as a 'victim' under these proposals, children must have received a positive reasonable grounds decision under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a system frequently criticised for its poor decision-making and lack of a formal appeal system.

83. Refugee Action

Refugee Action objects to the erosion of the rule of law that we believe will be brought about by the MoJ's proposals. We strongly believe that in our adversarial legal system there must be equality of arms in order to ensure justice. In our view, access to justice is a universal right with no qualification based on nationality or immigration status. The MoJ's proposals threaten these fundamental principles by cherry-picking groups of people who will be excluded from access to legal aid to protect them against injustice or to challenge unfair decision-making. The impact of these measures, we believe, is to create an underclass of people who have the potential to be abused at will with no meaningful recourse to the courts.

84. Northern Save Justice Alliance

The Northern Save Justice Campaign believes legal aid cuts will hurt the poorest, and small and medium sized organisations employing hundreds of people to deliver effective advice in places like Manchester and Sheffield won't survive. The cuts in April have already led to a rise in litigants in person in the Sheffield civil courts, and more people going to MPs and free services like the East Manchester Legal Advice Centre, which is run by student advisers. But these sources can't meet the demand for advice. We are worried about the long term social costs of people not getting the help they need and believe a fair society is one which protects justice for all.

85. Coram Voice

Coram Voice provides advocacy services to children in need, looked after children and care leavers. These children and young people without exception are vulnerable and have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect. For many the state is corporate parent. Children and young people with whom we work frequently experience decisions from children's services that fail to implement the law and statutory guidance. It is crucial that they are able to access the courts through high quality specialist legal representation where advocacy alone has been unable to secure their rights and wellbeing.

It is ironic that the Government seeks to improve the lives of looked after children and care leavers and yet through the legal aid changes is limiting their right to court action when this goes wrong.

86. Greater Manchester Welfare Rights Advisers Group

As advisers, across a wide region, we call for the restoration of legal aid cuts in social welfare law and for the stable funding of advice services and other agencies empowering and supporting local residents. Local people need access to redress against bad decision-making by agencies such as DWP - the 'polluter pays' principle should apply. Other services need funding to support challenges such as JR when public bodies fail. We oppose the proposed extension of residence rules and we support rights to representations in criminal law, for example for prisoners, where fair treatment, rehabilitation and preparation for release are paramount.

89. National Association for Youth Justice

We are concerned that children will be particularly badly affected by the proposed legal aid cuts. It is accepted that children should be treated differently to adults in the criminal justice system but these proposals ignore that. Children who find themselves in the criminal justice system often have many other problems such as learning and communication difficulties as well as mental health issues and the obvious vulnerabilities as a result of age. These proposals are incompatible with the delivery of a professional, specialised service to children.

87. Jewish Council for Racial Equality

The Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE) works with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and children. The proposals state that legal aid would not be granted after appeal rights have been exhausted and a claimant had been in the UK unlawfully. This would mean they would fail the residency test and would be ineligible to apply for further legal aid for a fresh asylum claim even if their circumstances have changed and their claim would otherwise have been successful. Justice would be denied to this vulnerable group; a value which we, as Jews, hold dear.

90. Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue

Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue have throughout its 50 years engaged with social issues across its home Borough of Hillingdon. We have supported our members and friends who were asylum seekers and those without means to pursue their legal entitlements. The proposed changes to legal aid contracts would have made this pursuit of legal entitlement extremely difficult if not impossible. We urge you to reconsider the legal aid cuts.

88. Jeneration and RSY-Netzer

Jeneration and RSY-Netzer are Jewish Youth and Student organisations that are committed to social justice. We know from the Asylum Seeker Drop-in centres run by several synagogues of our parent movement (The Movement for Reform Judaism) about the desperate situations people find themselves in, and just how important public funding to pursue their cases is. These people are destitute, with serious mental or physical health needs – and they are legally entitled to ongoing financial support and accommodation. Further reductions in legal aid contracts will put individuals who have a right to social support at even greater risk. We urge you to reconsider the legal aid cuts.

91. Jewish Social Change Hub

JHub is a Jewish organisation that engages in social action across the Jewish community and beyond, and knows how desperate people are who receive public funding to pursue their cases. We work with the NNLS Asylum Seeker Drop In, which supports asylum seekers to appeal their cases through a firm of solicitors. These people are destitute, with serious mental or physical health needs - legally entitled to ongoing financial support and accommodation. Further reductions in legal aid contracts will put these individuals who have a right to social support at even greater risk. We urge you to reconsider the legal aid cuts.

92. LJY-Netzer, NOAM, Habonim Dror, BBYO and Hanoar Hatzioni

We are Jewish youth movement organisations, namely RSY-Netzer, LJY-Netzer, NOAM, Habonim Dror, BBYO and Hanoar Hatzioni, from across the UK, engaged in social action in both the Jewish and wider communities. Our youth movements support social justice in the UK, and believe that further reductions in legal aid will put individuals (such as asylum seekers) who have a legal right to social support at even greater risk. We urge you to reconsider the legal aid cuts.

95. Junior Lawyer's Division, Law Society of England and Wales

The JLD opposes the proposal to remove legal aid for serving prisoners because it will erode Access to Justice and the Rule of Law. If the proposed legislation is enforced, even fewer lawyers will be able to develop expertise in criminal law, and most of the few that remain will lose their jobs. This will reduce the available skills and expertise within the legal profession and ultimately place anyone accused of committing a crime or detained in prison in a very weak position.

Removing legal aid for serving prisoners would reduce legal aid for treatment matters and therefore would have a particularly devastating effect on prisoners who have mental health issues and learning disabilities. These changes would also deny asylum seekers and immigrants access to a fair trial or any remedy for abuse they have suffered.

Prisoners cannot vote and, without the right to legal representation, they will lose any ability to engage in discussion or raise concerns about government policies that directly affect them. Prison may be a loss of liberty, however it should not mean a complete loss of your voice or access to legal representation and justice.

93. British Tamil Forum

There are several thousands of Tamil asylum seekers in Britain and most of them need legal assistance to argue their case with the UK Border Agency. The legal representation of these people is vital as failed asylum seekers are often arrested, interrogated and tortured on their return to Sri Lanka. The Home Office has on several instances granted asylum to many such victims who managed to make their way back to Britain. Several INGOs and countries have highlighted the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Most of the asylum seekers can not afford to meet the legal expenses on their own. The previous cuts under LASPO have reduced the number of legal aid solicitors taking on such cases and we are seriously concerned vulnerable asylum seekers will be left without expert legal advice if the future proposals are implemented. Without legal aid these people's lives would be put in grave danger if their cases are not argued by legal experts.

96. Bail for Immigration Detainees

Bail for Immigration Detainees opposes the legal aid cuts because the residence test is unworkable and unlawful. Without legal aid people held in immigration detention can be treated unlawfully or held in an unlawful manner without being able to hold the Home Office to account. People like the four severely mentally ill men unlawfully detained who the High Court also found to have been treated in an inhuman and degrading manner while in detention, or the women allegedly sexually assaulted in Yarl's Wood IRC recently for which two staff members have now been dismissed. Legal aid for detainees acts as a crucial safeguard in the face of the dysfunctional and failing UK Border Agency (now part of the Home Office).

94. The Refugee Council

The rationale for these cuts is deeply flawed as the Government has conceded that the savings they generate will be negligible. Meanwhile the human costs will be extremely high, as people whose life and liberty is at stake are denied access to justice. By targeting those in our society most likely to suffer from arbitrary and unjust decision making by the authorities, but least able to defend themselves, and to do so for crude political advantage, smacks of scapegoating and a cynical pandering to prejudice. We urge the Government to think again about these unnecessary and highly damaging cuts.

97. Mary Ward Legal Centre

The Mary Ward Legal Centre lost legal aid funding to help over 1500 people in need a year following the last set of cuts. The next set of proposed legal aid cuts push access to justice further out of sight. The role of judicial review in challenging poor and unjust decisions is central to the rule of law. If we believe, as a society, that people should have access to justice then we need a legal aid system that reflects that belief. These changes move us further away from that what should be considered fundamental to a democratic society

98. End Child Detention Now

End Child Detention Now is extremely concerned about the proposed changes to legal aid especially with regard to children, unaccompanied minors and families who are the subject of immigration control. A large proportion of initial Home Office decision-making is subsequently overturned on appeal, and the removal of legal aid for all but non-asylum detention cases and Article 3 claims will mean that access to justice is effectively denied. Preventing children from accessing family and private life remedies under Article 8 is also against the best interests of the child. The Secretary of State must halt these discriminatory and damaging cuts.

99. Newham Monitoring Project

Cuts to legal aid will hit people from BAME backgrounds hardest. Our casework already demonstrates the difficulties and barriers black communities face in fighting racism and discrimination. The cuts will leave many of the cases we work alongside with no access to legal support and unable to hold authorities to account; we have already witnessed the start of this - one case who is challenging the police over failures in investigating a serious sexual assault would now be unable to do so. The reduced ability of people to bring cases to justice will result in a worse situation for everybody.

100. The Poppy Project

The changes will disproportionately affect migrant and non-British national women, which will indirectly discriminate against race/nationality. The changes will discriminate against women who have experienced domestic violence and could leave trafficked victims at risk of further treatment amounting to slavery. Ultimately we hold very real concerns that changes, particularly the proposed 'residence test', would be a bar to women seeking legal protection, secure housing, justice and access to their children. This would leave vulnerable migrant women, who have experienced violence, exposed to further victimisation. Women will feel forced to stay with a violent partner who poses a risk to their life.

101. The Anti-Trafficking Legal Project

The Anti-Trafficking Legal Project (ATLeP) is a network of specialist practitioners who advise, represent and support victims of trafficking and other vulnerable people.

The proposed reforms to legal aid give serious cause for concern in relation to access to justice and protection for victims of trafficking.

The residence test for civil legal aid would prevent victims of trafficking from challenging unlawful Home Office decisions not to accept there are reasonable grounds to suspect they may be a victim of trafficking. This initial decision triggers access to safeguarding and support services and a reflection period to enable victims to escape the influence of their traffickers and make an informed decision about providing information about their trafficking to the authorities. ATLeP members regularly have to bring judicial reviews to challenge poor quality Home Office decisions on identification, an essential safeguard that would be denied with the removal of legal aid, with serious and wide-ranging consequences.

102. Release

Release opposes the legal aid cuts on a number of grounds. We are extremely concerned that vulnerable people, particularly those who use drugs problematically and/or have mental health conditions, will be negatively impacted on by the proposed cuts. Our clients are already marginalised and need additional, not reduced, protection. If introduced, the changes to Legal Aid will result in large sections of society being unable to hold the Government to account for their decisions. It is unreasonable to expect that individuals will be able to adequately represent themselves without any adverse effects, to both them and the justice system as a whole.

103. The Consortium of Expert Witnesses to the Family Courts

The Legal Aid cuts also threaten the work of expert witnesses for families who rely on Legal Aid. The Government makes this out to be an issue of expert clinicians' income, but the real victims are the children and their families who are the subjects of Family Court proceedings. Our nearly 600 members regularly offer the Courts fresh and different views on issues such as non-accidental injuries, mental health problems within families, and child development. This may make it possible for children to remain in their families or may protect children by identifying risks not previously recognised. Recent cuts have made this work financially precarious. Further cuts will lead to our disappearance, and with us will go expertise built up over many years. Families then will no longer have clinical understanding when decisions are made about their future.

104. Kurdish Community Centre & Halkevi

We are extremely concerned about the potential impact of the cuts to the legal aid budget introduced by this Coalition government and believe they will have a direct and damaging impact on the most vulnerable members of the Kurdish community. Unfortunately, because of their position as refugees and people seeking to resolve protracted asylum cases, many Kurds are forced to seek legal advice and representation. We believe that the reductions in funding will have a potentially devastating impact on the access to essential legal services on which many Kurdish people depend.

Through bitter experience the Kurdish community in the UK has been made aware of the importance of proper legal advice and representation. Justice has to be universal and available to everyone; if this does not happen, then in effect justice is being denied and the country itself is a much more unfair place as a consequence. Therefore as a result of these ill-thought out measures Britain's reputation as a country with a fair legal system is greatly diminished in the eyes of many people. The Kurdish community is much dismayed by these policies but still hopes that the cuts can be reversed even at this late hour.