Your address 1

Your address 2

Your town

Post code

[Insert date]

[Date]

[Name of your MP] MP

[constituency office address]

Dear [Name of your MP] MP,

As one of you constituents I would like to draw your attention to the proposals contained in the Ministry of Justice consultation paper: “Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system.” In short, the proposals will mean that fewer people will have access to free legal advice and legal representation than at any time since legal aid was introduced. This will have a direct impact on your constituency through more individuals seeking your help.

It is a basic right in our democratic society that everyone is entitled to be represented in cases that fundamentally affect their everyday lives. The proposals restrict a person’s right to choose their own lawyer, reduce the number of providers of legal support, and introduce contracts to companies who will provide the ‘best value’ financially without due regard for quality. The supplier base for criminal law will also be reduced to approximately one quarter of its current size. Everyone should be entitled to choose a lawyer based on quality, and not to be allocated one on the basis of whoever can do the job for the lowest price. In so many areas of public spending, the Government has encouraged informed customer choice; the criminal justice system must not be an exception.

Other proposed changes are undesirable for a number of reasons. Firstly, legal aid cuts may prove a false economy, with any cost savings made by the Ministry of Justice being offset by the greater burden placed on other public services, such as your surgery. Secondly, these changes will undermine the rule of law as the Government is effectively limiting access to justice for those without means. The Government propose to reduce funding for ‘weak’ Judicial Review cases, but such proposals would make it more difficult to hold the Government and other public bodies to account. I am sure you agree that it is important to maintain this accountability. Thirdly, the proposals will seriously increase the stress felt by many vulnerable individuals at a time of already great emotional distress.

When it was introduced, legal aid sought to protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of society. Everyone should be entitled to access to justice no matter who they are, where they live, or how much they earn. The proposed restrictions substantially undermine this fundamental principle.

I hope you will consider these views and the impact of these proposals on the most vulnerable people, in your constituency. I urge you to raise these concerns directly with the Secretary of State for Justice and seek to review the proposals and their effects at the earliest possible opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

[type and sign your name here]