

Petition to the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs & Migration

Budget 2027 must deliver comprehensive Civil Legal Aid Reform

September 2026

The Civil Legal Aid system is in crisis and in danger of collapse.

The signatories to this petition are calling on you to ensure that Budget 2027 provides the resources for the establishment of a fit-for-purpose and properly resourced civil legal aid system which includes targeted services for disadvantaged individuals and communities. Civil legal aid should be treated as the vital public service.

Since its establishment as a result of the *Airey* case, Ireland's system of civil legal aid has never been properly resourced. The total budgetary allocation for the Legal Aid Board in 2026 is €73 million. This is less than €99.1 million allocated to the horse and greyhound racing industries for the same year. Direct and indirect Government expenditure related to the Ryder Cup golf tournament now far exceeds €200 million.

The consistent under-funding and resourcing of civil legal aid has resulted in:

► **A Wholly Inadequate and Unfair Means Test**

The means test - which was inadequate when it was introduced 20 years ago - has never been updated. Anyone with a disposable income of more than €18,000 (approximately €5,000 less than an average minimum wage) is not able to get legal aid even in domestic violence cases. The wholly inadequate and unfair means test has excluded many people who do not have the resources to pay for legal services themselves from access to legal representation.

► **Legal Aid Deserts / Black Spots**

Legal aid deserts have formed around the country in areas where there are no lawyers willing to take on legal aid cases. There are also extremely long waiting times to see a Legal Aid Board solicitor. The most recent figures show that the waiting time for a first appointment with legal aid solicitor is up to 52 weeks in Castlebar, 62 weeks in Navan and 64 weeks in Sligo.

► **Difficulty in Hiring and Retaining Legal Aid Staff**

The Legal Aid Board has problems hiring and retaining staff as Legal Aid Board solicitors are paid less than solicitors in other areas of the civil and public services, which is completely unjustified.

► **Exodus from the Private Practitioners Panels**

Solicitors on the Legal Aid Board Private Practitioner Panels are paid less than solicitors on other panels for legal services run by public bodies. This has resulted in a 'quiet exodus' of solicitors from the panels, which contributes to the growing legal aid deserts.

► **Unavailability of Vital Child Welfare Reports**

The Legal Aid Board does not have the resources to pay for vital child welfare and other reports which are necessary for the proper running of cases.

The System cannot meet the needs of Disadvantaged Communities:

- The Legal Aid Board cannot provide basic legal information to people and communities about their rights and entitlements, either in a general or targeted way. The Legal Aid Board model is dependent on individuals knowing they have a legal issue and where to go to get it dealt with.
- It cannot provide legal aid in discrimination or employment cases, or in Social Welfare Appeals and cases heard by the Residential Tenancies Board.
- It cannot provide legal aid to NGOs. Communities have no say in the services that are provided or the areas of law that are prioritised.

Resolving the Civil Legal Aid Crisis and Creating a Fit-for-Purpose System

After a successful campaign backed by over 45 civil society groups, academics, legal practitioners and trade unions, the Government committed to a comprehensive review of the civil legal aid system which was completed in 2025. The Civil Legal Aid Review reports provide a blueprint for comprehensive reform of the system.

We welcome the commitment you made at the launch of the FLAC Annual Report to prioritise funding for the Legal Aid Board in the upcoming budget. Additional funding is clearly essential and long overdue, but it is not in itself enough. We have arrived at a once in a generation opportunity to establish a fit-for-purpose civil legal aid system which will target the needs of most disadvantaged individuals and communities.

To achieve this, the Legal Aid Board must be resourced to:

- Allow for an updated and responsive means test.

- ▶ Provide legal representation in the areas of law in which disadvantaged communities are most likely to have legal problems.
- ▶ Raise the rates of pay for staff and members of private practitioner panels to address retention issues and legal aid deserts.
- ▶ Pay for vital child welfare reports.

Funding is also needed to provide for the establishment of:

- ▶ General and targeted legal information services, where individuals and communities can find out about their rights.
- ▶ Targeted law centres aimed at disadvantaged groups, such as Travellers, People with Disabilities, and migrants and people seeking international protection.
- ▶ A network of Community Law Centres in the areas of greatest deprivation

Meaningful reform is straightforward, practical and cost effective.

These are comparatively cheap measures and would transform access to justice for the most disadvantaged communities. They will ultimately save money for the State by preventing legal problems and their consequences for individuals and families from escalating.

Signed:

1. Eilis Barry, Chief Executive, FLAC
2. Doireann Crosson, Head of Policy, National Women's Council
3. Tanya Ward, Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance
4. Karen Kiernan, CEO, One Family
5. Joe O'Brien, Executive Director, Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
6. Sarah Benson, CEO, Women's Aid
7. Rachel Morrogh, CEO, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
8. Mary-Louise Lynch, Director, SiSi
9. Saoirse Brady, Executive Director, Irish Penal Reform Trust
10. Paul Dornan, Managing Solicitor, Mercy Law Resource Centre

11. Jane O'Sullivan, Managing Solicitor, Community Law & Mediation
12. Katie Mannion, Managing Solicitor, Irish Refugee Council
13. Catherine Cosgrave, Managing Solicitor, Immigrant Council of Ireland
14. Claire McSweeney, Manager, Ballymun Community Law Centre
15. Shane O'Curry, Director, Irish Network Against Racism (INAR)
16. Kostas Kapanais, Interim Co-Director, NASC
17. Neil Bruton, Co-Director, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)
18. Lianne Quigley, Chairperson, Irish Deaf Society
19. Joan Carthy, Head of Advocacy, Irish Wheelchair Association
20. Amy Hassett, Co-Founder, Disabled Women Ireland
21. Robbie Sinnott, Chairperson, Voice of Vision Impairment
22. Áine Wellard, Disability Advocate
23. Elaine Teague, CEO, Disability Federation of Ireland
24. Derval McDonagh, CEO, Inclusion Ireland
25. Wayne Stanley, CEO, EPIC
26. Rebecca Gorman, Head of Media & Policy, INOU
27. Marie Casey, Executive Council Member, Unite the Union
28. Louise Bayliss, Head of Social Justice & Policy, Saint Vincent de Paul
29. Ber Grogan, Executive Director, Simon Community
30. Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland
31. Oisín O'Reilly, CEO, Outhouse LGBTQ+ Centre
32. Belong To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland
33. Daire Dempsey, Executive Director, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)
34. Martin Collins & Lynsey Kavanagh, Co-Directors, Pavee Point
35. Maria Joyce, Coordinator, National Traveller Women's Forum
36. Maureen Ward, Coordinator, Minceirs Whiden
37. Jules McDonagh, Resource and Information Officer, Exchange House
38. Heather Rosen, Traveller Rights Activist

39. Deirdre Duffy, CEO, Friends of the Earth Ireland
40. Donncha O'Connell, School of Law, University of Galway
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