



Vera Baird QC MP
Department for Constitutional Affairs
Selborne House
54 Victoria Street
London
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28 March 2007

Dear Vera

I am writing to you to add the voice of the Child Poverty Action Group to those already expressing deep concerns about the Unified Contract and calling for the signing date to be extended to allow further consideration of its terms.

We understand that many suppliers are considering not signing this contract and some are contemplating leaving legal aid work altogether. Those that do sign will feel that they are doing so under duress and may contemplate terminating their contracts at a later date.

We echo concerns that have been raised about the following clauses amongst others:

Clause 13 giving the LSC a unilateral right to amend any term of the contract, including for the first time any of the standard terms.

Clause 30 allowing termination of the contract at any time without any fault on the part of the supplier and without compensation on six months' notice.

We agree with the concerns that have been expressed by the Law Society, LAPG and other colleagues that organisations cannot reasonably be expected to sign so one-sided a contract which contains such uncertainty.

It is CPAG's firmly held view that legally aided advice and assistance to claimants has a vital role to play in fighting poverty and social exclusion by ensuring that those most vulnerable in society have a voice. We believe that public money spent on helping claimants to stay in their homes, keep their

children out of care, stay out of debt, access their benefit entitlement and otherwise defend and assert their rights before the courts will save money in the longer term.

We are concerned that the viability of legally aided services is being jeopardised by the LSC's plans, and we urge you to press for the contract deadline to be deferred to allow more time for negotiations.

Best wishes

Kate Green
Chief Executive

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