

## PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

### **PROPOSED GOVERNMENT CUTS TO CRIMINAL LEGAL AID RISK AN INCREASE IN MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE**

**Garden Court North Chambers respond to the Governments Consultation Paper on VHCCs and graduated fees.**

Criminal law and human rights set Garden Court North yesterday wrote directly to the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Services Commission in relation to the government's two consultation papers issued last year on proposed cuts to advocates' graduated fees and very high cost (criminal) cases with the letter highlighting the disastrous impact that further proposed cuts could have to both lawyers and the taxpayer.

Garden Court North stress that these proposed cuts raise issues of fundamental importance to the general public which are in danger of being overlooked and will have a major impact on the provision of legal services.

Garden Court North's Mark George Q.C. states "*we want to draw attention to the impact these proposals will have on the provision of criminal legal services and to warn people that far from saving money the real effect will be greater costs from delayed and mis-handled trials and miscarriages of Justice resulting from inexperienced lawyers having to handle difficult and sensitive cases*".

Garden Court North's letter resulted from the concern felt by the set that the impact of the proposed cut in fees will have a devastating effect on the provision of criminal legal aid in this country. In the letter Mark George Q.C. states "*We do not think that governments of a democratic hue should aspire to run down legal services to the extent that they endanger justice and the rule of law itself. One of the important attributes of democratic governments that mark them out as different is that they usually aspire to protect the most vulnerable and poor in society to ensure that they receive adequate public services based on their need rather than their ability to pay. These proposals will put the most vulnerable in an even more difficult position. They will increase the likelihood of innocent people being sent to prison. They are anything but in the interests of taxpayers and we reject them.*"

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

##### **Background information**

**Late last year the government issued two consultation papers, one covering the fees in very high cost cases (VHCCs) to cover the relative small number of very long and expensive criminal cases and another to cover fees in all other criminal cases. Both papers are couched in terms that require substantial cuts in barristers' earnings. The Bar Council and Criminal Bar Association have recently announced that they intend to mount a legal challenge to the fairness of the consultation process. As a result any detailed responses to the consultations are likely to be delayed.**

**By way of background the reforms introduced following the report by Lord Carter led in 2007 to the first rise in the fees paid to defence barristers in ten years. Less than two years later the government signalled its intention to tear up those reforms and impose substantial cuts in fees.**

**If you would like further information please call Paula Morris on 0161 236 1840 or email [pmorris@gcnchambers.co.uk](mailto:pmorris@gcnchambers.co.uk)**

- Garden Court North Chambers (The Chambers of Ian Macdonald QC), formed in 1996, is a progressive set of barristers dedicated to providing a high-quality service to all clients, particularly those disadvantaged by discrimination and inequality and has always had a strong commitment to publicly funded work.
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