



**Legal Services (Scotland) Bill  
Stage 3 Debate  
Wednesday October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Summary:**

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) welcomes the increased access and choice in the provision of legal services as set out in the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill and supports new provisions in the Bill that strengthen schemes and regulations on consumer protection. CAS also strongly supports provisions that would modify section 26(2) of the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980 and which were unanimously approved by all members of the Justice Committee at the Scottish Parliament.

**Introduction:**

Citizens Advice Scotland and its CAB offices form Scotland's largest independent advice network. Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the umbrella organisation for Scotland's network of 83 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) offices. These bureaux deliver frontline advice services throughout nearly 200 service points across the country, from the city centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh to the Highlands, Islands and rural Borders communities.

There are 2,200 volunteers in the service who provide almost 13,000 hours of their time each and every week. Paid staff provide a further 15,200 hours of work each week in management, support, administration and specialist advice work.

There are citizens advice bureaux in 30 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, making the network the only independent advice body in the country with truly national on the ground coverage.

Citizens Advice Bureaux traditionally help vulnerable people in their communities, although clients come from every section of society. An Ipsos Mori poll in 2009 found that one in five members of the public in Scotland had visited a bureau for advice in the last three years. In 2008/09, more than 250,000 clients brought new issues to bureaux in Scotland.

Bureaux helped clients deal with 545,715 new issues in 2009/10 – a 9% increase in new issues since 2008/09. Bureaux deal with nearly 1,500 new issues for every day of the year.

Last year bureaux across Scotland dealt with over 24,000 legal issues, 57% of which were regarding court proceedings, 15% were enquiries concerning solicitors and advocates and 8% were on compensation redress. Bureaux in Scotland dealt with over 3,000 cases on tribunal hearings in 2009/10, three out of five of which proceeded to a full tribunal hearing, with clients gaining over £8,000,000 with the help of their local bureaux.

The Bill provides bureaux with the ability to provide legal advice and services through a legal professional based at the CAB. This will increase the free and impartial service currently provided by local bureaux to people across Scotland, particularly for those who are vulnerable and unable to afford the services of a solicitor.

#### **Legal Services (Scotland) Bill:**

##### **Amendments to the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980:**

CAS strongly supports new provisions in the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill which would amend section 26(2) of the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980, allowing bureaux, like Law Centres, to directly employ solicitors for the purpose of offering not-for-profit advice to their clients. The provisions would extend exemptions that under the Act currently apply to law centres, to apply to citizens advice bureaux as well.

##### **Amendments that tighten regulation and strengthen consumer protection:**

CAS supports provisions in the Bill that ensure a higher level of consumer protection than currently exists, particularly in terms of consumer compensation.

CAS also supports amendments that establish a stronger regulatory framework for Licensed Legal Service Providers (LLSPs).

#### **Conclusion:**

The CAB service in Scotland supports the significant benefit increased consumer protection, regulation and access to legal advice and service will have on the most vulnerable people in Scotland.

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