

5 things you need to know about the legal aid bill

1 At least 500,000 people will be denied justice

The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill will deny legal aid to more than half a million people a year, according to the **government's own research**. Legal aid will be removed from most cases relating to debt, family break-up (including contact with children), education, clinical negligence, welfare benefits, housing, employment and immigration. The **most vulnerable** in society – those who are poor, old, disabled or mentally ill – will be hardest hit.

2 Legal aid cuts cost more than they save

The Ministry of Justice plans to cut legal aid by **£350 million a year**, but it will cost other government departments more. For example:

- King's College London found that cutting £10.5 million from **clinical negligence advice** will cost the NHS nearly three times as much.
- Citizens Advice Bureaux point out that **housing advice** costing £80 can save thousands for councils who are legally required to house homeless families.

The Ministry of Justice has admitted its predicted savings are **based on speculation** – and been reprimanded by the parliamentary justice and public accounts committees. Even those who normally support cuts, like former Tory minister Norman Tebbit and TaxPayers' Alliance head Matthew Elliott, have joined the opposition.

3 The bill undermines the rule of law

In the words of the independent commission of inquiry into legal aid:

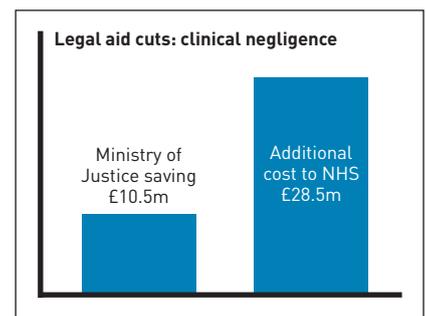
“There can be no semblance of **equality before the law** when those who cannot afford to pay a lawyer go unrepresented or receive a worse kind of representation than those who can.”

4 The voluntary sector can't fill the gap

Law centres and citizens advice bureaux have **already closed** due to council cuts. Legal aid is a lifeline for many of the remaining centres.

5 It's not just legal aid: the bill makes it harder for anyone without huge wealth to get justice

One alternative to legal aid is to instruct a solicitor on a **no-win, no-fee** basis. But changes to the rules on insurance mean that those who lose cases **may be exposed to massive debt** – even the loss of their homes. Only the very wealthy will be able to afford the risk.



Source: Unintended Consequences: the cost of the government's legal aid reforms, Dr Graham Cookson, King's College London, 2012

FALSE ECONOMY is the website for everyone concerned about the impact of the government's spending cuts on their community, their family or their job.

FalseEconomy.org.uk