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Dear Convener

Welcome from the Scottish Legal Aid Board

On behalf of the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB), I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Convener of the Criminal Justice Committee and to take this opportunity to introduce myself, the organisation I have the privilege to lead and the important work we do and support.

As I am sure you are aware, legal aid is a crucial public service. At an individual level, services paid for by legal aid enable people to enforce or protect their rights, defend themselves when the state and others take action against them and use the law to manage their personal affairs and relationships. At the collective level, the ability to use the law to resolve disputes or challenge the wrongful use of power supports the rule of law and provides a firm foundation for a society based on civil, political, social and human rights.

As the statutory body responsible for administering legal aid in Scotland, SLAB plays an important role in funding and providing life-changing services and advising both the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers on the operation of the legal aid system.

We see it as one of our responsibilities to use the unique data and evidence we gather as we perform our statutory functions to contribute to a well-informed public debate about how, and how well, legal aid is working. Insights drawn from that data and evidence, including feedback from those both delivering and accessing legally aided services, have informed our own views on the need for reform to ensure that legal aid can continue to serve the people and communities who rely on it.

We also believe that we have a responsibility to develop and maintain a positive and transparent relationship with the Parliament and its committees, so that the insights and evidence we can share might assist them in their crucial role of holding Ministers, SLAB and others to account and scrutinising proposals for change.

As you may be aware, the Scottish Government published a [discussion paper](#) on legal aid reform in 2025, and work continues to deliver tangible improvements within the current statutory framework. We have also published a range of information and insights [here](#) that may be of interest to Committee members.

While we are clear that the current legal aid system provides vital services to tens of thousands of people each year, we recognise the need for better tools and greater flexibility to target interventions, improve access to justice, and deliver what the public rightly expects of a modern, accessible public service.

SLAB is keen to work with both Parliament and the Scottish Government to explore how legal assistance can be planned, delivered and funded in a way that better reflects user needs and responds to changes across the justice system. Improving consistency of access to services across Scotland would help move legal aid closer to a public service model.

We believe that achieving this ambition will require transformational reform of the legal aid system through primary legislation, and we hope to see proposals brought forward during this parliamentary session.

Given the Committee's clear interest in the future of legal aid, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and the Committee to introduce the work of SLAB, discuss emerging issues within the legal aid system, and explore how we can best support the Committee throughout the parliamentary term.

We look forward to working openly and constructively to support you and your committee in the months and years ahead.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Colin Lancaster'.

Colin Lancaster
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