This brief submission to the Justice Committee relates to its consideration of a proposal to implement a register of interests for the judiciary. I am writing as an ordinary citizen, but my submission is informed by my experience as Scotland’s first Judicial Complaints Reviewer (JCR). In that previous role I gave evidence to the Petitions Committee in support of a register of interests.

Although now writing in a private capacity, I have served on public boards for nearly two decades and as a Board Member I have (rightly) been required to complete a register of interests for each role, to provide assurance to the public that my dealings are not motivated by money, family connections or friendships. The Justice Committee members who will take the decision on a register of interests, as MSPs must publish their interests too. It is time that the judiciary joined the rest of those in public life in taking this small, simple step to improve transparency and accountability, thereby enhancing their own reputation in the process.

I have long campaigned for greater transparency in public life, yet in my role as JCR I occasionally found the judiciary to be needlessly secretive. I am not suggesting that there was anything to hide, but a failure to be transparent inevitably left the public with whom I dealt feeling suspicious.

I will not rehearse the arguments in favour of a register of interests: they are well known. However, I would emphasise that although opposed by the judiciary, it is in their own interests as well as the public interest that there be a register of interests.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my respect for the judiciary and the essential work that they undertake. Judicial independence is vital to a democracy, but with independence goes accountability. A register of interests is a mechanism for enhancing accountability.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Moi Ali
18 September 2018