

News Release

4 February 2011

Vulnerable families put at risk by legal aid changes

Hundreds of vulnerable couples, who are suffering family break up or divorce, will lose financial support under the Government's new legal aid proposals, warns a Warrington solicitor.

Audrey Venables, head of family law at Forshaws Davies Ridgway, is concerned the new rules will have devastating consequences for many separating couples, who will be denied vital support and access to justice at a time when they need it most.



Under the Government's Legal Aid Reform Green Paper, it is proposed to remove legal aid to all co-habiting or married couples, with or without children, unless there has been recent domestic violence or the marriage was forced. And the definition of domestic violence is extremely tight and only applies where there has been a recent court injunction. Those people who do qualify will then only be eligible for telephone consultations with solicitors.

Audrey Venables is coordinating the local response to the consultation paper and will be fighting hard to protect the right of Warrington families to receive legal support when they need it. She has also sent letters to Warrington MPs Helen Jones and David Mowat, and local councillors requesting a meeting.

She said: "I am deeply concerned these proposed changes will make it practically impossible to gain the legal advice or representation that people genuinely need. Family break-down can be a harrowing time and expecting people to navigate the complex legal processes for resolving divorce, child access and family finance without proper advice is unreasonable. Without legal aid, many people will be left floundering."

She joins a growing chorus of opposition to the changes. Family law organisation Resolution believes the Government has "grossly underestimated" the vulnerability of

divorcing and separating couples and urges ministers to stop the proposed reduction of family legal aid entitlement. This is also echoed by single parent charity Gingerbread, who report that in a recent survey, 86 per cent of their members said they would have been unable to manage their dispute without the services of a lawyer.

The Government is hoping to save £350 million from its legal aid budget by making the cuts and has set a deadline, ironically Valentine's Day, 14 February, for comments. It proposes to continue limited legal aid funding for family mediation.

For more information, contact Audrey Venables at Forshaws Davies Ridgway on 01925 230000. www.fdrilaw.co.uk.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

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About Forshaws Davies Ridgway LLP (FDR)

- FDR is a full service legal practice with five offices in Cheshire and Warrington
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