



How to... meet with your MP

YLAL is encouraging all members, as well as [writing to their MPs](#), to go and meet with them personally in order to raise awareness in Parliament of the devastating impact of the proposed changes to legal aid contained in the [Transforming Legal Aid consultation](#). As MPs' summer recess continues, they will not be required to attend Parliament, so now is the perfect time to schedule a meeting in their constituency.

Contacting your MP

You can find out who your local MP is as well as their contact details by entering your postcode into <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>.

MPs can be contacted by post, email, fax, or telephone. All of these details can be found in their Parliamentary biographies at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps>.

You can also use YLAL's ["write to your MP"](#) tool.

To arrange a meeting, make a telephone call to their constituency office, and make a request to schedule an urgent meeting. You may wish to make the request in writing first (by letter or email), but it would still be advisable to follow this up with a phone call, to ensure the meeting actually takes place soon.

Preparing for the meeting

A meeting with your MP may well last only 10-15 minutes. You may be there with other people and only have a few minutes to actually speak. So you do not need to go with a detailed knowledge of all the proposals and criticisms, only those which you feel particularly strongly about. It is worth making a short list in advance of the meeting of the few key points you wish to make.

Some ideas of the sorts of concerns you may wish to raise are:

- The proposals may cost more than they save
- The impact on vulnerable clients
- The impact on access to justice and the rule of law
- The impact on social mobility for those trying to enter the profession
- The impact on junior lawyers
- The fact that these proposals will be brought in by secondary legislation so they will not be properly scrutinised by Parliament

It is a good idea to spend some time looking at your MP's interests to see what arguments might appeal to them most. Read their website and look at their news posts and background. Look for them on a search engine to see if they have ever said anything about legal aid or any groups who will be affected by the proposals e.g. asylum seekers, prisoners. Do they support a local charity that works with people from these groups? Do they have close links to a local advice centre that could be affected by the cuts? Are they interested in issues like diversity or social mobility?

MPs respond to personal examples. If you are in practice do you have a client you could talk about? How would they be affected by the cuts? Don't worry if you are not in practice and don't have any direct experience of clients' problems. Get in touch with us if you would like a case study to share with your MP. Alternatively, our [legal aid leaflet](#), created for MPs contains a number of case studies.

You may find some of the following resources useful background reading:

- [The consultation](#)
- [Our response](#)
- [Our one-page "explanatory-note"](#)
- [Our legal aid leaflet](#)
- [Our MPs briefing prepared for the House of Commons backbenchers debate on 27 June 2013 can be downloaded here](#)
- [The transcript of the House of Commons debate](#)
- [The Law Society's paper on the alternatives to PCT can be downloaded here](#)
- [Chris Grayling's evidence to the Justice Select Committee](#)
- [The transcript of the House of Lords debate of 11 July 2013](#)
- [Paper on the knock-on costs of the proposals](#)
- [Comparative paper on costs of criminal justice](#)
- [A letter from 145 Treasury Counsel](#) (barristers who work for the Government) to the Attorney General about why cuts to funding for judicial review and the proposed residence test are wrong
- [Thanks2LegalAid](#) – a good site (created by YLAL) to see the benefits of legal aid in human terms

The meeting

- **Don't presume knowledge** – your MP may know very little about the proposed reforms or their knowledge may be limited to what they have seen in the media or been told by the Government. Be prepared to explain briefly the proposals which you are concerned about. It may be useful to provide [our one-page "explanatory-note"](#) which briefly summarises the proposals, to your MP.
- **If you can make it relevant to your constituency, then do so.** For example, what will be the local impact of price competitive tendering? Or is there an example of a local judicial review which was important to the area which would be unlikely to go ahead under the proposals?
- **Request that they raise their concerns directly** with the Lord Chancellor, Chris Grayling (especially if they are Conservative), or the Legal Aid Minister, Lord McNally (especially if they are Liberal Democrat).

- **Request that they attend and speak at the Opposition Day debate on legal aid**, which will be taking place in early autumn or at the Westminster Hall debate on 4 September 2013.
- **Give them something to take away with them.** MPs may well forget the details of your meeting or not have time to hear all your arguments while you are there, so it is useful for them to have a reminder. For example:
 - [Our one-page “explanatory-note”](#)
 - [Our legal aid leaflet](#)
 - Articles relevant to any points you have raised e.g. a news item or blog post
- **Suggest a follow-up action**, such as getting them to agree to update you, or to send you any response they receive from the Minister.

Follow-up

- Send a follow-up letter after the meeting, confirming your main points and asking if they have been able to contact e.g. the Minister on your behalf.
- Let us know how it goes! It is always helpful for us to know which MPs are sympathetic and what sparked their interest, or which ones are good at following up on meetings. Did you have a case study that the MP responded to – could you share it with us? Contact ylalinfo@googlemail.com to let us know.