Submission from Graeme Murray for the Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill

My name is Graeme Murray, I am senior partner in the firm of Graeme Murray and Co. in Aberdeen. Our firm has been involved in providing access to justice to the less well off members of Scottish society, thro’ the provision of Legal Aid for the past 14 years. We have a large Family law practice in Aberdeen, and also deal with a large volume of criminal matters in the Grampian area.

Many of the people we represent are socially disadvantaged, and as a result can be difficult and taxing to deal with. Despite this, our firm has believed that what we do is very important and worthwhile in a civilized society, particularly where the media are increasingly critical and intolerant of the less well off and disadvantaged members of our society.

In undertaking legal aid work we have seen our income reduce steadily over the last decade, with no significant increase in rates in THIRTEEN years. Still, we have continued to provide a service to the public.

The rates of remuneration are now so poor that we are unable to attract new blood into this line of legal work, but still we provide a service to the public.

We have had to contend with an enormous increase in administrative paper work thanks to the Scottish Legal Aid Board, all time consuming, (tho’ none of that time chargeable of course) so that we all have to work extremely long hours, and still we have provided a service to the Public.

This Bill however, is utter nonsense, and is likely to cause any solicitor to seriously consider whether they can possibly continue to provide a legal service to the disadvantaged in society, when we are to be laid open to blackmail by the unscrupulous client, who on realizing that a complaint by him will cost their solicitor £400, whether it has any merit or is totally unfounded. No doubt on learning of this ridiculous scheme, such unscrupulous characters will be looking to exploit this scheme to their financial advantage.

The executive have already destroyed NHS Dentistry in Scotland by refusing to listen to the dental profession or remunerate them properly, and frankly the same timebomb has been ticking in the Scottish Legal Aid system for years now.

It appears to me that this bill is not a timebomb, but a nuclear device which will see lawyers desert the legal aid system en masse leaving the poorer people in Scotland with NO access to justice at all. A disgrace for any civilized nation!

Drop this Bill Now!