



## Press Release

### Legal Aid Board's Annual Report 2022: Progress Amidst a Persistent Quest for Justice

**11<sup>th</sup> December 2023** - The Legal Aid Board today publishes its Annual Report 2022, marking significant strides in facilitating access to justice across civil legal aid services, international protection and family mediation.

In 2022, 20,705 applicants accessed civil legal aid services from the Law Centres, representing an increase of 38% on the previous year. While the Legal Aid Board covers a wide range of civil law issues most applications have consistently sought assistance with family-related matters. Notably, 6,858 of the total civil legal aid services were for international protection applications, marking an increase of 368% on the previous year. Services in this regard are provided in three of the Legal Aid Board's Law Centres, namely Smithfield (Dublin), Pope's Quay (Cork) and Seville House (Galway) and through a private solicitor's panel.

The Legal Aid Board's commitment also extends beyond litigation to encompass dispute resolution. In 2022, its free and universally accessible family mediation service assisted 1,503 couples in resolving disputes. Critically, expanding family mediation services alongside existing Law Centres underscores the Legal Aid Board's dedication to promoting family mediation as an integral component of its services.

Commentating on the annual report, Legal Aid Board CEO Joan Crawford said:

"Throughout the report, we acknowledge the tireless efforts of our legal professionals, mediators and staff, whose dedication and expertise were instrumental in making a difference in the lives of those we serve. Though we celebrate our accomplishments, our commitment to enhancing access to justice remains steadfast. There's a lot done, but undoubtedly, there's more to do.

The Legal Aid Board remains resolute in its mission to advocate for fairness and equality. Moving forward, we aim to focus on delivering on our responsibilities under the Family Justice Strategy, meeting the increasing operational demands related to Assisted Decision Making and International Protection, and preparing for the output of the Civil Legal Aid Review. To this end, we thank Minister McEntee for our recent €5.5 million allocation in Budget 2024 to recruit new staff, invest in technology, and provide for additional costs related to the increase in international protection applications."

Welcoming the report, Minister Helen McEntee stated:

"I thank the Board and its staff for their ongoing work in providing legal aid and advice to support people of limited means to access justice in civil law matters. In particular I would like to commend Joan Crawford for the outstanding job she has done since being appointed CEO of the Legal Aid Board earlier this year. It is clear from this report that demand for the vital services provided by the Legal Aid Board is increasing – particularly in relation to the Civil Legal Aid Scheme, which was set up more than forty years ago. In June 2022, I established the Civil Legal Aid Review Group to review the current operation of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme and make recommendations for its future, including in relation to



eligibility. I would also like to acknowledge participation of and the support provided by LAB to the Review Group in its work. I look forward to receiving the Group's report when finalised and considering its recommendations.

I am committed to delivering an ambitious programme of family justice reform, including implementing the Family Justice Strategy and the Family Courts Bill 2022. The Legal Aid Board and its staff play an important role in family justice and is central to delivering a number of actions in the Strategy, including increasing the provision of its family mediation services through the development of a panel of private mediators.”

For more information on the Legal Aid Board's Annual Report 2022, please visit the website at [LegalAidBoard.ie](https://www.LegalAidBoard.ie).