

NO MAD LAWS CAMPAIGN

BULLETIN 6

10th October 2011

1. Progress through Parliament

The House of Commons Bill Committee will report to the Commons on or after 13th October. Suggested amendments to the Bill (already prepared) regarding the issue of the exclusion of the majority of 'accommodation cases' involving Gypsies and Travellers will now be submitted to the Lords.

The Legal Aid Minister, Jonathan Djanogly, gave a speech to the Legal Aid Practitioners' Group conference in Birmingham on Friday 7th October. It was a very uninspiring speech and contained no new concessions and certainly nothing to assist our campaign. Quite frankly he shouldn't have bothered turning up. Don't forget that 90% of the 5,000 submissions to the Government's consultation process on the legal aid reforms/cuts were against the reforms/cuts. Mr Djanogly said that the Government carefully considered all responses. What does 'carefully considered' mean then? Is it 'carefully considered' in the Harvey Smith sense?

2. Legal challenges

Two challenges have been lodged dealing with the failure of the Equality Impact Assessment that accompanied the Bill to even mention Gypsies and Travellers despite the disastrous effects of the Bill on Gypsies and Travellers. One challenge involves two Gypsies, one on an unauthorised development and one who has to resort to unauthorised encampments. The other challenge involves an Irish Traveller who is a tenant on a local authority site and who is concerned about the removal of legal aid from cases involving disputes (other than possession actions) under the Mobile Homes Act 1983. In the first case the

Acknowledgement of Service (incorporating the grounds of resistance to the claim) has been received from the Government and the court has ordered that the question of permission (whether or not the case can proceed to final hearing) should be dealt with on the papers before 1st November. In the second case the Acknowledgement of Service is due by Friday 14th October.

The Petition

Well done to Cathay Birch of Gypsy Message Board and Gill Brown of London Gypsy and Traveller Unit who are in charge of the petition. At the time of preparing this the online petition has reached 852 . There is also a paper petition.

We are now on the run up to the formal presentation of the petitions to Downing Street and Parliament. Anyone who hasn't yet signed it please go to <http://www.petitiononline.co.uk/petition/no-mad-laws/3062> .

Please continue to circulate it.

Media and Publicity

The Law Society's Sound off for Justice campaign and the Justice for All campaign have managed to keep the legal aid cuts on the media agenda. Please take any opportunity you can to publicise our campaign.

Lobbying MPs

Thanks to Siobhan Spencer of Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group and the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups and Helen Jones of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange who have organised an excellent postcard to your MP which is available from the Nat Fed. Contact the Nat Fed at info@nationalgypsytraveller.org . These postcards have proved very successful in getting responses from MPs. Please send us any responses from MPs you get.

Stories from the Frontline

We are currently representing clients on a private caravan site (protected by the Mobile Homes Act 1983) who are facing harassment from their landlord. The harassment is clearly intended to force our clients to leave the site. Our clients are being assisted under legal aid and we are seeking an injunction to stop the harassment. The other day one of our clients said to us: “Without a solicitor acting for us, they would have got us out by now.” Under the Government’s proposals they will not have a solicitor in the future.

Conclusion

Despite the government not even mentioning Gypsies and Travellers in the Bill, there has been a deliberate targeting of Gypsies and Travellers in the Bill under a smokescreen of action against squatters in buildings. Yet, as we say above, Gypsies and Travellers are not even mentioned in the Equality Impact Assessment that accompanied the Bill.

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