



The Bar Council

Public Office (Accountability) Bill Second Reading - Briefing for Peers

About Us

The Bar Council represents approximately 18,000 barristers in England and Wales. It is also the Approved Regulator for the Bar of England and Wales. A strong and independent Bar exists to serve the public and is crucial to the administration of justice and upholding the rule of law.

Summary

The Bar Council supports the Public Office (Accountability) Bill which aims at delivering fairer, swifter justice for bereaved families at inquests through greater access to publicly funded legal help. However, we are concerned that the proposed inquest legal aid fee scheme is not fit to meet the exponential rise in inquest cases the Ministry of Justice predicts once the Bill takes effect.

Legal Aid

In our response to the Ministry of Justice's consultation on inquest legal aid fees, we highlight that barristers' fees will remain unchanged, with no indication from the Ministry of Justice that these will be increased with the enactment of the Bill, which in effect amounts to a real terms cut.¹ The scheme also fails to account for the substantial pre-hearing work barristers routinely undertake, effectively leaving barristers unremunerated. Finally, the fee scheme ignores the complexity often inherent in inquest work, meaning that a barrister's skills and experiences are unaccounted for in these fees which were last set in 2013 with the Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) Regulations 2013.

These issues are central to whether the proposed scheme will be capable of supporting the Ministry of Justice's anticipated and substantial expansion of legally aided inquest cases, which it currently predicts will increase from approximately 200 – 400 per year, to 11,400.² The proposed fee scheme will simply not attract the necessary amount of counsel required to meet this coming surge in demand, leaving bereaved families at risk of losing access to the skilled and experienced representation they require, jeopardising the Bill's legislative intent.

Conclusion

The Bar Council welcomes the aims of the Bill, notably those that would allow more bereaved families to be eligible for legal aid at inquests. We urge the government to review the proposed scheme and ensure that the demand is met with the relevant resources and fee uplift.

**The Bar Council
September 2026**

¹ The Bar Council, [Bar Council response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on changes to fee scheme arrangements for legal aid related to inquests](#), June 2026

² MoJ, [Impact Assessment: Public Office \(Accountability\) Bill – Parity of Arms measures](#), August 2025