

# Legal aid waiting times continue to spiral

**T**he latest table of waiting times from the Legal Aid Board make for depressing reading. The state-funded body, responsible for providing civil legal aid to eligible people, has seen both its maximum waiting times and overall number of people waiting on appointments at its law centres increase substantially over the past year.

Out of 29 law centres, 22 centres have a maximum waiting time of more than 4 months. This goes against the Legal Aid Board's own recommendation as discussed by Mr Justice Kelly in the landmark case of *O'Donoghue v Legal Aid Board and Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform*. The Board itself recognised that no-one should have to wait any longer than two to four months for civil legal aid. FLAC monitors the Legal Aid Board waiting list statistics and the latest figures we have relate to January 2012.

Residents of Clondalkin, Tallaght and

Tipperary face the longest wait with delays of up to 10 months. This was closely followed by centres in Dublin's Brunswick Street and in Cork's Pope's Quay as well as in Kildare, Kilkenny and Laois, all with waiting times of up to 8 months.

The situation looks even bleaker when compared with statistics from the same period last year. Between January 2011 and January 2012, the waiting times had increased at 19 out of the 29 centres surveyed. The most alarming rise took place at the Popes Quay centre in Cork, where wait times grew from 3 months to 8 months in 2012. Waiting times had reduced at just 3 centres and remained unchanged at the remaining eight centres.

As of January 2012, 4443 people countrywide are waiting for their first appointment with a solicitor. This is a remarkable increase of 40% from January of the previous year. Individual centres

have also witnessed a dramatic rise in total numbers of people waiting for appointments, such as Brunswick Street in Dublin 7 and Kilkenny, with increases of 280% and 180% respectively.

One of FLAC's perennial concerns is that the current civil legal aid infrastructure is not meeting the need of the general public. Through our campaigning, publications and the diligent work of our volunteers in legal advice centres nationwide, FLAC is attempting to bridge the gap that currently exists.

However, FLAC is not a direct substitute for civil legal aid. Our work complements that of the Legal Aid Board, it does not replace it or in any way excuse the unsatisfactory waiting times revealed in the Legal Aid Board's statistics. FLAC's primary function remains a campaigning one and we will continue to monitor the state legal aid waiting times in great detail.

## New journal on Community Economic Development Law seeks submissions

**A** new publication has been initiated by Northside Community Law Centre focusing on the effect of the overlapping fields of social policy, law and economic development on local communities.

The Irish Review of Community Economic Development Law and Policy already has 2 issues under its belt and is now seeking submissions from legal practitioners, academics and students alike for up-coming editions of the online journal.

Edited by Colin Daly and Marie Antonietta Nestor and published quarterly by NCLC, the peer-reviewed journal is generating debate around

community economic development law and increasing awareness of this non-traditional legal area.

Currently, the editors are seeking submissions for issues three and four. Articles, book reviews and case studies relevant to the issues' themes are all welcomed.

□ Issue three will focus on 'community investment and participation'. Suggestions for submissions in this area include (but are not limited to): community finance; the role of partnerships; tax incentives or cooperatives. **The deadline for submissions for issue three is 30 April 2012.**

□ Issue four will be based on 'legal services and community legal education'. Suggestions for submissions include the impact of the proposed Legal Services Regulation Bill; *pro bono* experiences; clinical legal education from a practitioner / student / community perspective or the role of community law centres. **The deadline for inclusion in issue four is 31 July 2012.**

If you have any queries or would like to submit an article for The Irish Review of Community Economic Development Law and Policy, please e-mail the editorial team at [editor@nclc.ie](mailto:editor@nclc.ie)