

Foreword

2025 was another rewarding year for the Legal Aid Department, marked by steady progress in enhancing access to justice in the midst of a changing social and economic landscape. It is my pleasure to present to you the Annual Report 2025 of the Department, which summarizes our major and continuous efforts in refining our services, strengthening collaboration with stakeholders, and responding proactively to the evolving needs of members of the public who rely on legal aid to vindicate their rights and resolve their disputes. I hope you enjoy reading this Report.



Chris Y.T. Chong, SBS, JP
Director of Legal Aid

Serving the Community

Our mission remains clear and unwavering: to ensure that no one who qualifies for legal aid is denied access to justice because of lack of means. Guided by this mission, the Department has maintained a client-centred approach in handling applications and conducting litigation, and continued to place emphasis on effective case management and prudent use of public resources so that limited funds were deployed efficiently for the benefit of those in need.

Public engagement and outreach remained key pillars of our work in 2025. Through talks and briefings given to social workers and other frontline professionals of the Social Welfare Department, Hospital Authority, non-governmental organisations and trade unions, we sought to deepen their understanding of our legal aid schemes, including the scope, application procedures and eligibility criteria. Equipping them with the necessary knowledge, they could help share useful information on legal aid services to people from different walks of life, whom they had frequent contacts with.

We have continued to make use of different communication channels to enhance our presence in the community so that information about legal aid could be more accessible. For instance, we organised a talk on legal aid services with focus on employee's compensation and personal injuries at work at a community hall, meeting nearly 100 attendees face-to-face, in April 2025. We also actively participated in the three sessions of "Free Legal Advice Programme" of the "Law Week" organised by the Law Society of Hong Kong between September and December 2025. During the event, our professional officers provided legal aid information and answered enquiries from the general public at the enquiry booths set up in three different districts. Young generation also had our special attention. Throughout the year of 2025, we received many groups of young people visiting our Department, including tertiary students and secondary school students of different educational, social and ethnic backgrounds. They were briefed on not only the work and services of our Department, but also some career-related information.

Secondary school students also had a chance to attend court hearings at the High Court to gain a first-hand experience of court proceedings under the school visit programme.

We have continued to foster strong ties with our stakeholders, including the two legal professional bodies, labour groups and the Hong Kong Federation of Insurers, actively promoting our work and engaging in regular exchanges on issues of shared concern. We have also provided training and briefing to legal professionals to enhance their understanding of our work and legal aid services. For example, our directorate officer delivered a presentation on the handling and billing of criminal legal aid cases for junior barristers at an event organised by the Hong Kong Bar Association in March 2025. Two other directorate officers spoke at a continuing professional development seminar hosted by the Hong Kong Academy of Law in September 2025 to share information on the operation of legal aid schemes.

Exchanging Views with Parties outside Hong Kong

We value every chance to present our services and share perspectives with visiting officials and guests from outside Hong Kong, notwithstanding the diversity of our respective legal systems. In this regard, we received a group of Mainland officials from Justice Bureau of Shenzhen in May 2025, exchanging views on the provision of legal aid services. We also introduced the work of our Department and the legal aid schemes in Hong Kong to some law students

from a university in Shanghai visiting us in August 2025 and another group of Mainland officials from Yunnan in October 2025. Apart from our close connection with the Chinese Mainland, I and several directorate officers met with representatives from the Anti-corruption Bureau and the Legal Aid Service of Georgia in September 2025, providing them with an overview of our legal aid regime and engaging in fruitful discussions on the best practices in safeguarding access to justice. These visits and exchanges have further strengthened our ties with counterparts in different jurisdictions and enhanced mutual understanding of the role of legal aid in upholding the rule of law.



Quality Service to the Public

The Department is committed to providing professional and quality legal aid services to those who qualify for legal aid. During the year, we took forward various initiatives to improve service quality and operational efficiency. These included the ongoing review and refinement of internal guidelines and manuals for assigned solicitors/counsel, the strengthening of training for our

professional and supporting staff, and the wider use of information technology in case processing and handling.

In February 2025, the Department launched a Legal Aid Virtual Assistant Chatbot named "Aidie" to support legal aid pre-application general enquiries. The Chatbot was built with Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing technology to handle general enquiries on legal aid services in traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese or English. We also successfully rolled out the revamped Case Management and Case Accounting System, which is the major information system supporting our core businesses, in the third quarter of 2025. The revamped system with enhanced functions and web application design could greatly facilitate our daily work in effective processing and monitoring of applications and cases, as well as easy retrieval of data and management reports.

Commendation on our Professional Service

I am proud to share that a very experienced staff of ours was awarded The Ombudsman's Awards for Officers of Public Organizations in 2025 for her exemplary performance in customer service and handling enquiries from members of the public who wished to apply for legal aid. The distinguished award not only fully recognized her hard work, leadership and excellence in service, but also served as a testament to our long-term commitment to delivering high standard and professional legal aid services.

Looking Ahead

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my colleagues at all levels. Their unfaltering professionalism, dedication, and sense of duty in serving the public have been instrumental in sustaining legal aid as a cornerstone of the rule of law in Hong Kong. I also wish to express my sincere thanks to members of the legal profession who act for our aided persons, as well as to the Legal Aid Services Council, the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, the two legal professional bodies and other partners for their continuous support, constructive advice and close collaboration over the year.

Moving forward, the Department remains dedicated to achieving the highest standards in service delivery and to meeting emerging challenges and opportunities with foresight and determination. Through our joint efforts and unwavering commitment to ensuring equal access to justice, I am confident that the Legal Aid Department will continue to serve the community with pride and integrity.

Chris Y.T. Chong, SBS, JP

Director of Legal Aid in 2025