

# Guide to the Legal Aid Scheme

## THE MEANS TEST

From 16 October 2019, applicants for civil legal aid must meet the following criteria:

- The average Per Capita Gross Monthly Household Income (PCHI) must be \$950 or lower for the last 12 months prior to the application;
- The Annual Value of applicant's place of residence owned by the applicant must be \$13,000 or lower; and
- The applicant's savings and non-CPF investments must be \$10,000 or lower, if he is younger than 60 years old. Applicants aged 60 and above are allowed to have savings and non-CPF investments of \$40,000 or lower.

The applicant must not own any other property besides his/her place of residence.

address reflected on the NRIC as the applicant for legal aid.

The MinLaw Services Centre will calculate the PCHI as part of the Means Test, based on the supporting documents.

### Example

For a household of four where there are 2 adults, one earning a gross monthly income of \$2000, the other earning a gross monthly income of \$1,800, and 2 children not earning income, the average PCHI would be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Average Per} \\ \text{Capita Monthly} \\ \text{Household} \\ \text{Income (PCHI)} \end{array} = \frac{\$2000 \times 12 + \$1800 \times 12}{4 \times 12} = \$950$$

### How are savings and non-CPF investments calculated?

This is done by adding up the value of the following assets that the applicant owns in his name:

- Bank accounts savings (personal or joint);
- Overall value of shares in the applicant's Central Depository (CDP) account; and
- Any other financial/investment products with a cash value, such as fixed deposit accounts at financial institutions, and shares, bonds and exchange traded funds aside from those in the applicant's CDP account.

### What happens if I fail the Means Test but I really cannot afford to pay for a private lawyer?

If the applicant fails the Means Test but has certain reasons or information that the applicant think makes his situation different or special, for example if he has a very serious illness and cannot afford legal services as he needs to pay for major medical procedures, he may contact the MinLaw Services Centre for further assistance.

### What is Average Per Capita Monthly Household Income (PCHI)?

The Average PCHI is the average gross household income for the last 12 months divided by the total number of household members (including the applicant).

$$\text{Average PCHI} = \frac{\text{Total gross income of all household members in the last 12 months}}{\text{Number of household members} \times 12}$$

“Gross income” refers to the gross wages or salaries before deduction of CPF contributions and personal income tax. It comprises basic wages, overtime pay, commissions, tips, other allowances, and bonuses. For self-employed persons, gross income refers to profits from their business, trade or profession (i.e. total receipts less business expenses incurred) before the deduction of income tax.

“Household members” refers to persons related by blood, marriage and/or legal adoption and have the same residential

## QUALIFYING FOR HELP

### What type of cases are covered?

The Legal Aid Scheme covers civil matters, such as divorce, custody of children, adoption, wrongful dismissal, letters of administration/probate, tenancy disputes, and other claims, such as compensation for injuries from accidents or medical negligence, or breach of contract.

The Legal Aid Scheme does not cover criminal matters. You may go to [www.lawsocprobono.org/Pages/Criminal-Legal-Aid-Scheme.aspx](http://www.lawsocprobono.org/Pages/Criminal-Legal-Aid-Scheme.aspx) for more information on the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme.

### What type of help can I get?

The Legal Aid Bureau provides:

- Legal Advice:** Oral advice on Singapore Law.
- Legal Assistance:** Drafting of wills and deeds of separation.
- Legal Aid:** Representation in civil court actions.

### Do I qualify for help from the Legal Aid Bureau?

To qualify, you must be a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident<sup>1</sup>.

In addition:

- For Legal Advice and Assistance matters, you must pass the Means Test.
- For Legal Aid, you must pass both the Means and the Merits Tests.

The **Means Test** assesses your financial circumstances. This will be conducted shortly after you submit your application

The **Merits Test** assesses if you have reasonable grounds for bringing or defending a case in court. This will be

conducted at a later stage, after we get a thorough understanding of your case.

## START YOUR APPLICATION

### How do I apply?

- Come personally to the MinLaw Services Centre. If you are below 21 years old, your guardian needs to apply for you.
- Alternatively, log on to our e-Services Portal on our website at [lab.mlaw.gov.sg](http://lab.mlaw.gov.sg) to register. You will need your SingPass to log in. Upon your successful application, you should attend at the MinLaw Services Centre within 2 working days to complete your registration.

### What should I bring when I apply for legal aid?

Please bring the following documents on the day you come to apply:

- Your identity card (IC), or Valid Passport if you are a Singapore Permanent Resident (PR);
- Updated Personal and/or Joint Account Bank Books or Statements, Fixed Deposit Receipts and/or any other Bank-related investment information;
- Your latest Central Depository (CDP) Account Statement (if any); and
- Any other documents relevant to your application such as Court Orders or Personal Protection Applications.

You will need a SingPass account. If you do not have one, please visit [www.singpass.gov.sg](http://www.singpass.gov.sg), or visit any SingPass counter at a Community Centre near you to register. If you are unable to register for a SingPass account, please bring the following additional documents:

- Your CPF Contribution History for the past 12 months, or if you are 65 years and above, your CPF Transaction History for the past 12 months, which you can obtain from CPF Board (CPF Hotline: 1800-227-1188);
- Your latest income Tax assessment, which you may obtain from IRAS (IRAS Helpline: 1800-356-8300), or your IR8A form, which you may obtain from your employer; and
- Any property notices or letters which show the Annual Value of the property you own, if it is not an HDB flat; you may obtain this document from IRAS.

## AFTER YOU APPLY

### When is legal aid granted?

If you pass the Means Test, the Legal Aid Bureau will meet with you to understand your case in detail, and assess if you have a reasonable case to bring or defend in court (“the Merits Test”). Legal aid will be granted to you if you pass the Merits Test.

### Do I have to pay for legal aid?

For your legal aid or legal assistance case, you may be required to pay a financial contribution to the Bureau for the work done. The amount of the contribution depends on your income and assets, the complexity of the case, and the type of work done.

### What happens to my case after legal aid is granted?

The Bureau will inform you that legal aid has been granted and a lawyer will be assigned to your case.

The Legal Officers of the Bureau will handle most of the cases. Some cases are assigned to volunteer lawyers in private practice who are on the Bureau’s panel of assigned solicitors.

### Am I subject to third-party casino exclusion?

From 1 August 2013, if you are granted legal aid, you will be subject to Third-Party Casino Exclusion. Under the Third-Party Casino Exclusion, you shall not enter or remain, or take part in any gaming in any local casino premises. The Third-Party Casino Exclusion will remain in force until all your active legal aid cases are closed. Please note that until the casino operator is notified of the termination of your Third-Party Casino Exclusion, you can be refused entry into local casinos. For more information on Casino Exclusion, please call the National Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-6-668-668.

### How can I check the progress of my case?

If you already have a registered case, you can log on to the e-Services Portal at [lab.mlaw.gov.sg](http://lab.mlaw.gov.sg) to check the status of your case, submit electronic copies of your documents, track your appointments or update your personal details. You will need your SingPass to log in.

For further enquiries, please submit via our online enquiry form at [eservices.mlaw.gov.sg/enquiry/](http://eservices.mlaw.gov.sg/enquiry/)

### Legal Aid Bureau Location and Registration Hours

Our location and registration hours are reflected below:

#### Ministry of Law Services Centre

45 Maxwell Road  
#07-11 The URA Centre (East Wing)  
Singapore 069118  
Tel: 1800 2255 529 (1800 CALL LAW)

#### Registration Hours

Mondays to Fridays  
(closed on Weekends  
and Public Holidays)  
8.30am to 5.00pm



Scan the QR Code  
to visit the Legal Aid  
Bureau's Website

<sup>1</sup> You may also qualify if you are a citizen or resident of contracting states, and are making an application under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For more information, please refer to the Singapore Central Authority's website at [www.hcch.net](http://www.hcch.net).