

LEGAL AID COUNCIL NOW CURRENT IN PAYMENTS

Some 353 cases were completed in the courts by the Legal Aid Council in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2007/08, bringing the aggregate total for the financial year to 1,496 cases. Meanwhile, the Council paid out in excess of \$42.9 million for legal services under the Legal Aid Scheme during the financial year.

The Executive Director of the Legal Aid Council, attorney-at-law Glen Cruickshank, Q.C., who gave the performance update at the Ministry of Justice's quarterly review session this Tuesday (April 29), noted that while representation was down marginally over the 1,556 cases completed in the 2006/07 period, there was an appreciable increase in the number of duty counsel sessions which moved from 419 in 2006/07 to 455 in 2007/08.

Duty counsel, which is legal assistance provided at police stations for detained persons, is important as it seeks to break the culture of arbitrary charges being brought against citizens, when the evidence is purely circumstantial, Mr. Cruickshank explained. He also outlined plans to introduce the service on weekends at selected stations in the Kingston Metropolitan Area.

The Executive Director told Senior Managers and Heads of Agencies and Departments attached to the Justice Ministry that the timing for the introduction of weekend Duty Counsel was largely dependent on how soon the service rate payable to lawyers under the legal aid scheme can be decided on.

Plans are also to be finalised for the introduction of a mobile clinic service by the second quarter of the new financial year, Mr. Cruickshank said.

Other reports from the Ministry's fourth quarter review showed that the Ministry of Justice paid out some \$213 million in judgement debt and an additional \$10.45 million as reimbursements to citizens who served as jurors, during the 2007/08 financial year.

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