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BAR COUNCIL CHAIRMAN CALLS FOR BAR'S VOICE TO BE HEARD ON CUTS

The Chairman of the Bar Council, which represents barristers in England and Wales, has reacted angrily to the deep cuts to publicly funded criminal barristers' fees, which come into force today. From today, barristers' fixed fees for criminal defence will be cut by a total of 13.5% over the next 3 years starting with an immediate cut of 4.5%. These cuts are contained in legislation rushed through Parliament by the Ministry of Justice the day after the Easter break, the same day the election was announced.

The Chairman of the Bar, Nicholas Green QC said:

"We are extremely angry that the Government decided in a few days over Easter, and in the dying throes of the last Parliament, to impose these savage cuts. It appears to have little concern for the consequences on the administration of justice and the public interest in ensuring access to justice. The Bar does not seek to avoid its fair share of the pain arising out of cuts to public spending but no other part of the public sector has been required to accept a cut of this depth in pay.

"Moreover, there are far better ways of making savings which will do much less harm to the administration of justice. The Bar has made it clear that it is committed to working with government to make savings, but these approaches have been ignored.

"Given the unnecessary haste with which these cuts were imposed, the Bar must debate their impact on all levels of the profession and particularly on the Young Bar, which will be most badly affected by them.

"I am eager to convene a meeting of the Bar in order to hear the voice of the profession on this issue so that we can consider our options and agree the way forward."

He added:

"The Government has claimed that it will not cut front-line services, but that is exactly what these cuts will achieve. We oppose these cuts in the strongest possible terms and will canvass the views of the profession as a whole, to ensure its voice is heard."

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. Further information from the Bar Council Press Office on 020 7222 2525.
2. The General Council of the Bar is the Approved Regulator of the Bar of England and Wales. It discharges its regulatory functions through the independent Bar Standards Board. It represents the Bar by:
 - Promoting the specialist advocacy and advisory services of barristers;
 - Ensuring access to justice on terms that are fair both to the public and practitioners;
 - Promoting the high quality training and professional development of all barristers to ensure the highest standards of practice and ethical behaviour;
 - Working for the efficient and cost-effective administration of justice;
 - Encouraging access to, and diversity within, the profession so that it is open to all people of ability whatever their background; and
 - Strengthening and developing the work and the values of the Bar at home and abroad.