Dear [Candidate],

I am a voter in your constituency. I am a barrister [or I am a wife/partner/husband of] and I practise [who practices in] criminal law. I am interested in your views on criminal justice before I cast my vote in the election. As you will undoubtedly know over past years successive governments have cut criminal legal aid.

Do you agree that we are well past the point at which further cuts can be made and that if they continue, victims, defendants and society will suffer? Do you agree that this will manifest itself in less money for expert witnesses, fewer qualified practitioners to represent defendants, and more frequent appeals which will cause the court system will grind to a halt? Do you agree that the pressure to drive down costs already means that defendants are not always represented by qualified legal professionals, but instead are assisted by interns and less qualified staff?

Do you agree that these shortages and recent proposed changes in contracting will cut the supply of experienced lawyers who know their local market and are able to provide advice with flexibility and when it is needed urgently, for example, in a police station and that it will become more difficult for lawyers to make the investment in their practices necessary to sustain a service in criminal law?

I hope that you accept that being a criminal legal aid practitioner is no longer regarded as a viable career path for young professionals. We see fewer able graduates willing to specialize in criminal law and those who do continue to come are increasingly from the more affluent sections of society. Diversity amongst the future supply of advocates is being significantly damaged.

The result will be fewer advocates who are able to prosecute and defend the most serious cases, and the pool of experienced and able practitioners, from whom the next generation of judges is drawn, will evaporate.

Justice for victims and defendants is at stake. They, and society, deserve better.

If elected will you ensure that there are no more cuts in the criminal legal aid budget?

You know that our constituency contains a number of solicitor firms specializing in criminal law. [set out names of firms] Their practices are under threat. The livelihoods of your prospective constituents are thereby threatened. You do not need me to tell you that they provide a valuable local service and importantly much needed employment for your prospective constituents. Will you agree to campaign to scrap the “dual contracting” model for legal aid lawyers?

I look forward to your response. I should tell you that I intend to forward your letter to the Criminal Bar Association for their information.

Thank you.