

# Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## Background

- Chief Minister David Saul Marshall first mooted the idea of legal aid in 1955.
- He was of the view that the justice system was “one of the principal pillars of the development of this territory”. It supported the rule of law. A legal aid department would help to ensure that even those of limited means could have equal access to the legal system.
- The Legal Aid and Advice Bill was read for the first time on 4 April 1956, and the Legal Aid and Advice Ordinance 1956 was passed.
- The Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) came into operation on 1 July 1958.

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A  
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Click [here](#) to find out how LAB helps applicants in a professional and compassionate manner

[www.mlaw.gov.sg/content/lab/en/about-us/corporate-video.html](http://www.mlaw.gov.sg/content/lab/en/about-us/corporate-video.html)

# Milestones

1958

Singapore became the first country in South East Asia to have a legal aid scheme when the Legal Aid Bureau commenced operations on 1 July 1958.

1960

The number of applications had tripled compared to the first year. A scheme was devised to let private lawyers play a role in providing legal aid. These lawyers, known as Assigned Solicitors, became an integral part of LAB.

1965

In October 1964, the Bureau extended assistance to applicants involved in proceedings before the Syariah Court.

1978

The Legal Aid Fund was created on 2 June 1978. Money collected by way of costs (i.e. the amount awarded by the court to the winning party in a case) and applicants' contributions are paid into the Fund. The Fund is then used to defray the expenses, fees and allowances payable to Assigned Solicitors and to meet out-of-pocket expenses incurred in connection with the application for legal aid.

1986

The Legal Aid Review of 1986 resulted in many recommendations to improve LAB's work processes in order to serve applicants better and to prevent the abuse of legal aid. Changes included more stringent screening procedures for applicants, and the assignment of more cases to Assigned Solicitors.

1997

LAB tapped into information technology to enhance the quality of service delivery. Amongst other things, an electronic queue system was introduced at its offices for walk-in applicants. A telecommunications system was also set up which an applicant could dial to hear general information on LAB or speak to an officer directly.

2003

The Legal Aid Review of 2003 made changes to the workflow in matters such as the collection of applicants' contributions and the payment of Assigned Solicitors' bills, for greater efficiency. Key changes made were the outsourcing of certain functions such as the service and delivery of documents, and improvements to the training of various personnel.

2005

LAB introduced LAMP, an electronic management system which was used largely for administrative activities such as processing contribution payments and registration of cases.

2013

The 2013 amendments to the Legal Aid and Advice Act updated the legal aid means test limits, and gave the Director of Legal Aid a discretion in family proceedings involving children or protection order applications between spouses or ex-spouses, to ensure that the most vulnerable persons in family-related disputes are eligible for legal aid.

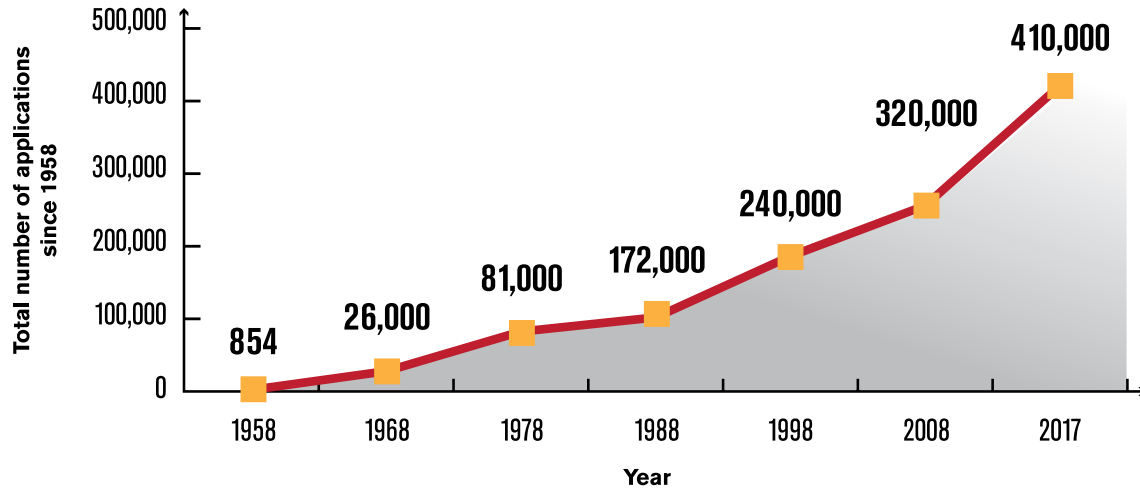
2016

On 29 February 2016, the Legal Aid Bureau launched its new case management system, GENIE, a paperless process for managing cases. Legal Aid Bureau became the first "law firm" in Singapore to go "paperless" on such a big scale. It had functions for the drafting, storing and retrieval of documents and information. This improves LAB's efficiency, by allowing multiple officers to access and work on the same case concurrently. The new system also saves applicants' time, by allowing them to correspond with LAB and submit relevant documents online.

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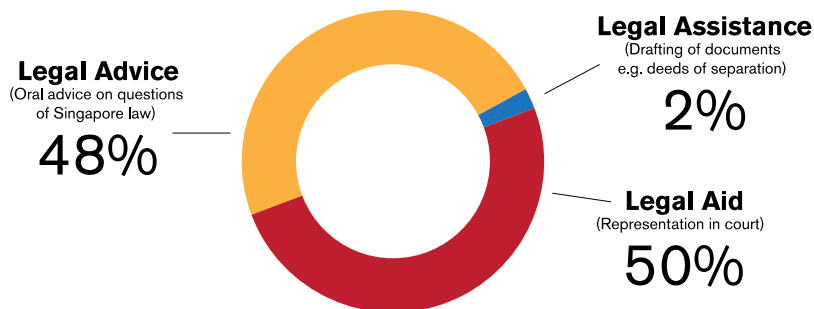
# Work over the last 60 years

- LAB has helped many lower income persons in their civil legal proceedings over the past 60 years. LAB has received more than 400,000 applications over the past 60 years.



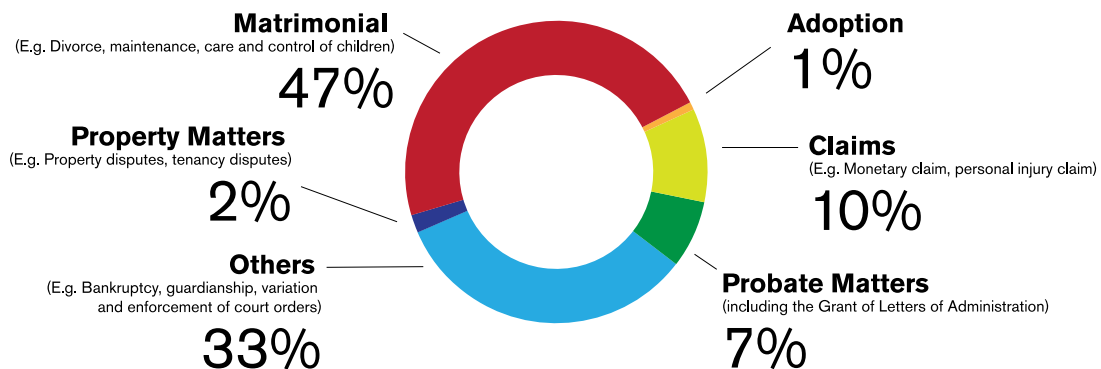
Figures after 1958 are rounded off to the nearest thousand.

## Type of assistance provided (2017 Figures)



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### Type of applications received (2017 Figures)



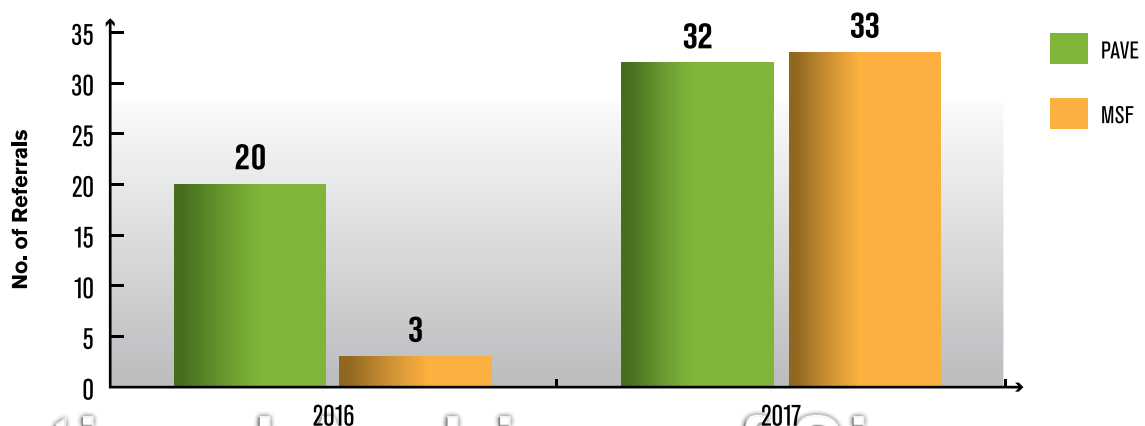
# Strong support from the legal fraternity

- LAB's work is not possible without the support of the legal fraternity. Today, about 190 Assigned Solicitors, handle about a third of LAB's cases.
- In total, the Assigned Solicitors have taken up more than 14,000 cases over the past 60 years.

## Meeting non-legal needs

- Some of LAB applicants also face non-legal issues in addition to legal issues.
- In 2016, LAB established a protocol with social service agencies to help applicants with their non-legal needs as well.
- LAB partnered PAVE to help applicants who are victims of family violence. LAB also has a referral system with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), to refer applicants who require other non-legal assistance, for example parenting issues, caregiving issues, to the appropriate agency for help.

### Number of referrals in the past 2 years\*



\* Referrals from and to LAB. No. of referrals from MSF to LAB is not available.

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### Types of referral cases for 2017

