

**DELIVERED ADDRESS BY MR GREGORY VIJAYENDRAN, SC,  
CHAIRMAN OF LAW SOCIETY PRO BONO SERVICES AT VIRTUAL  
LAUNCH OF LAW AWARENESS WEEKS @ CDC 2021  
ON SATURDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2021, 11AM**

---

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law, Mr  
Edwin Tong, SC,

Chairman of Mayors' Committee, Ms Low Yen Ling

Host Mayor Mr Desmond Choo,

Mayors Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng, Mr Alex Yam, and Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman,

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Introduction**

1. Let me first wish a very warm welcome to everyone on the launch of Law Awareness Weeks @ CDC 2021. For celebrance, Happy Mid-Autumn Festival too. Thank you for taking time out from a weekend to join us this morning. This is a special moment we share together, to launch what will indisputably be the start of an enlightening few weeks ahead. Community and volunteers alike will learn from, learn with and learn about each other.

**About LAW@CDC**

2. Law Awareness Weeks @ CDC began in 2015 as Law Society Pro Bono Services' (or LSPBS for short) premium programme in law awareness.

Through the years, this safety net of practical legal knowledge has grown tighter and taut. Year on year, its strength has grown as a safety net and transformed into a trampoline to enable Singapore residents to rebound with resilience. With this novel legal literacy programme, residents know about their legal rights and duties. But this not about operating in a DIY mode. Instead, our community has become more aware adopting what is known as the Goldilocks principle in education. It is about adequate legal education one that is just right – adequate for legal self-care and sufficient to know when something is wrong or recognising problem and issues so as to call for a legal professional’s help.

3. The safety net or trampoline metaphor of LAW@CDC is interwoven by our strong partnership with the People’s Association (PA) and the Mayors’ Committee of the Community Development Councils (CDCs) and more recently, the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) – NUS, SMU and SUSS and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association (SCCA for short). To each and every one of our invaluable partners, we are truly grateful for your interweave of this safety net and trampoline.
4. Last year, due to Covid-19, all our legal talks were streamed as online webinars. We were simply blown away by the fact that our 16 webinars reached over 1,500 participants. The number of people reached and

touched by our webinars did not see a significant reduction compared to previous numbers. Instead, we saw a tripartite increase in the average attendance per talk, compared to the previous three years. The online modality allowed us the practical efficiencies of (i) reducing travelling time for participants; and (ii) overcoming the constraints of physical venues and resources for greater outreach and impact. And it remains a great leveller. These webinars were also uploaded onto LSPBS' YouTube channel post-event, making legal knowledge accessible 24/7 to people who did not, or could not, have the opportunity to attend it live. To date, our LAW@CDC 2020 webinars have attracted a further 1,200 views on our YouTube channel, and are still being publicised through various avenues. At LSPBS, we believe that this is a step forward in the right direction, and we will continue to find optimal ways to reach out to those needing such knowledge and nuanced information to effectively communicate to different language-based and generation-based demographics of society.

5. Beyond numbers, practicality and efficiencies, a striking feature of these online modalities is the veil of anonymity. This allows legal talks on more sensitive and personal topics such as personal debt and divorce to reach participants with tears and fears, who may otherwise choose to steer clear.

### **This year's Theme and Topics**

6. The theme for this year's LAW@CDC is Relationships and Healing. I have shared in a variety of past settings in the legal profession, this vital paradigm for lawyers is as healers. Lawyers who are present here today – you are community healers. But the truth is, we are not the only healers. For relationships to heal, it will require a community of healers. Specifically, an integrated and unified team of multidisciplinary healers and restorers including social workers, counsellors, grassroot volunteers, civil society and the legal profession. Each bringing our own unique blend of expertise and experience to offer the right counsel as we weave another safety net that is strong and secure
7. And as Minister Tong had reminded us as well, it is about the environment that we want to create, that not only focuses on symptoms but also on causes. We have seen more acute situations given the danger of our new normal leading to the new abnormal. Restrictions in movements both locally and abroad have accentuated fault lines and separation in families, among neighbours, and within society. Mending some fractured and frayed relationships and ties will require a whole-of-community approach in a far more intentional and people-centric way to reach the new vulnerable in our community. One practical example is where family members and relatives cannot meet due to COVID-restrictions and geographical separation. This places stresses and strains on relationships which sometimes reach breaking point. Tech can do much but tech can only do so much to make up for the

lack of the whole-of-person experience in the actual (not virtual) presence of another person.

8. This year's talks will broadly cover three main areas – Community, Employment, and Family - the 12 legal talks touch on pertinent topics from online harassment and social media usage to freelancing and home-based businesses. We hope that these carefully curated topics on current hot button topics will help increase the community's legal awareness and knowledge to continue building a safety net and trampoline, along the lines of the metaphor that I have shared. And as Minister Tong said, to demystify some of the legal jargon.

9. We will also be highlighting the importance and role of mediation in conflict management. Time will fail me to speak of mediation in this setting. Minister Tong has already spoken succinctly on it. But one facet which brilliantly brings together the threads of community, relationships and healing is conciliation. On that note, we welcome Community Mediation Centre (CMC for short), for coming on board our webinar on Community matters. CMC is a valuable partner and its mediators are practically conciliators as well, addressing the root of relationship fault lines. This is really the upstream work that Minister Tong spoke about in

terms of trying to promote pro-social norms. Conciliation is that safe place that Mayor Desmond Choo spoke to us about. A safe place in a safe space.

### **Legal Clinics**

10. So to summarize, arming individuals with legal knowledge empowers them from within with resilience. And it enables residents in our community to ask the right questions to volunteer lawyers. Legal awareness underpins access to justice that Minister Edwin Tong spoke to us about in his keynote address.

11. That leads me logically to legal clinics. LSPBS administers legal clinics. Many in the audience today know that. The signing of the first MOU between LSPBS and the CDCs in 2014 to enhanced integration between legal clinics, social assistance providers and referral networks and increased legal awareness in the community. Today, over 14,400 applicants have sought legal advice at the Community Legal Clinics (CLCs) as at July 2021. This is no mean feat. It shows demand and it showcases supply.

12. Following on from this year's launch of the Youth Community and Legal Clinics announced last year by Minister Edwin Tong SC, it is truly encouraging that we have served around 200 applicants to date. The next

frontier is to increase support for victims of online sexual harassment at these Clinics. This is a problem, because if you look at the AWARE numbers, from 2016 to 2020, the number of survivors seeking support from AWARE's sexual assault care centre tripled. Last year, they saw a record of 1,018 cases. We've read anecdotal reports in the media.

13. And so, the vision is to help victims through our ad hoc pro-bono representation under our ad hoc pro-bono scheme for exceptional cases. What is striking is, this vision came from two young lawyers, Melody Lau and Kenneth Ng. About a month and a half ago, Melody and Kenneth stepped forward, offering to take on cases to represent youth victims of online sexual harassment needing urgent protection under the existing Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) regime, in particular injunctive remedies such as expedited and final protection orders. Melody and Kenneth saw a need to help young and vulnerable victims (i) lacking finances; (ii) fearful of potential backlash from family or harassers; (iii) who may find it traumatic to collect necessary evidences from online for their POHA applications. They responded with compassion to free these digital captives from their tears and fears. With existing support schemes already in place, LSPBS made an appeal for young lawyers to come forward and expand resources to help in this area.

14. In two weeks, a webinar was curated and conducted. Just last week, on 14 September 2021 with Melody as the moderator, to upskill and build capability among some 200 volunteer lawyers on how to advise victims of online harassment. A separate webinar for members of the public to learn more about the legal remedies under POHA, and where to seek legal assistance, is taking place at the **Help! I am a Victim of Online Harassment!** webinar on the 16 October 2021. Kenneth is the Speaker. The Youth Community and Legal Clinics is a valuable port of call that doubles up as a lighthouse for youths in distress. We look forward to working with the IHLs to reach out to more youths.

15. Earlier this year in April, LSPBS inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MCCY's SG Cares Office to signify our commitment towards supporting skills-based volunteerism in Singapore; in particular, the legal sector. By working in tandem with MCCY's SG Cares Office, we aim to nurture both hard and soft skills among our volunteers in the legal community to sharpen their serve. Melody's and Kenneth's initiative is an exemplar of skills-based training for our youth volunteers to help a peer in distress and desperation on account of online harm and harassment. With this, and other initiatives, the endgame is a pool of highly trained volunteers with strong skills and strong heart to match, to support our pillars of access to justice in the ecosystem.



## **Volunteer Appreciation**

16. This brings me to my final part about the importance of volunteers in making all this happen.

17. We truly thank all volunteer lawyers and anchor law firms who have given their time, talents and treasure to support our Community Legal Clinics at the CDCs. Since the signing of the first MOU, the number of registered lawyers volunteering at these clinics have increased by 64% from 1500 to 2463 as at July 2021.

18. I extend my deepest appreciation to all the speakers and moderators of this year's Law Awareness Weeks, who are all our partners in legal care. They will use every ounce of their energy and enthusiasm, experience and expertise, to educate and engage with participants.

19. Our gratitude and appreciation also goes out once again to our partners, People's Association, the CDCs, IHLs and SCCA, for what promises to be another great edition of LAW@CDC version 7.0.

## **Conclusion**

20. I am heartened by how much we have grown as the nation's premier public legal literacy programme, and how much passion and learnings we have shaped to make this incredible partnership impactful in outcome. But we will never rest in past laurels. Vincent Van Gogh said "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together". Through our LAWs series and the series of webinars to be streamed this year and the future, we will continue to build great things in this nation in legal literacy.

21. Enjoy LAW@CDC 2021!