

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY CHAIRMAN OF PRO BONO SG,**

**MR GREGORY VIJAYENDRAN, SC**

**LAUNCH OF LAW AWARENESS WEEKS @ CDC 2023**

**SATURDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2023**

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 Mohd Fahmi Aliman,

Mayors Ms Denise Phua, Mr Desmond Choo, and Mr Alex Yam,

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Introduction**

1. Good afternoon and a warm welcome to the launch of Law Awareness Weeks @ CDC 2023. Thank you all for taking the time off from a weekend to grace this event. I am thrilled to see the growing momentum and enthusiasm year after year surrounding these weeks. It truly reflects our shared commitment to build a democratic society based on justice and equality. Today, we gather here with a shared purpose as we embark on a journey of collective impact that will span the forthcoming weeks.

## **About LAW@CDC**

2. Law Awareness Weeks @ CDC was born from the conviction that individuals, regardless of their background, should receive practical working knowledge and understanding of their legal rights and legal responsibilities in the context of the milieu of Singapore society today. By bridging the gap between the complexities and sophistication of the law and the general public, we empower vulnerable and disadvantaged communities among us. Thereby, ensuring that legal knowledge and knowhow are not merely the province of a privileged few. Legal literacy is critical to assess the rule of law in society. After all, you need to know the law to uphold the rule of law. In Pro Bono SG, we endeavour to arm each person with the necessary practical legal knowledge and knowhow to effectively navigate legal systems. The endgame? To enable the common man to protect their rights, seek justice, and make legally informed decisions.
  
3. As we move into our ninth year of Law Awareness Weeks @ CDC, we as a collective team have settled into a good rhythm and have a well-developed modus operandi. Last year was the year of hybrid everything. People talked about hybrid work, hybrid cars, hybrid AI (artificial intelligence), and even Gartner's concept of hybrid thinking as an organic discipline for taking on wicked problems. At PBSG, we are no different – in 2022, we embraced hybridity. A hybrid of physical talks (non-existent in pandemic days) and online webinars. Through this mixed modality, we leveraged on the best of both worlds, gleaming the best and benefits of both modes for different demographics. Physical events have three advantages. First,

we reach audiences who are not digitally literate. Secondly, we foster a deeper connection and engagement not just among the audience members, but also, as between the speaker and facilitators as well. In person settings make it more conducive for spontaneous and dynamic interactions and more effective non-verbal communications. Thirdly, by being together in a physical space, it engenders a sense of camaraderie, collegiacy and collective purpose. People bring their own special energy and can potentially lift each other's spirits, enhancing the impact and effectiveness of the conversation. Last year, we had 530 participants for 16 physical talks. With such strong demand, we have more than 30 physical talks lined up this year. On the webinar front, we continued to reach more than a thousand participants through our 11 webinars. We think online webinars will remain as an important modality in our awareness efforts. They grant anonymity, convenience and practicality to participants. By amalgamating these two approaches, we engaged more than 1,600 participants in total last year, an increase of 500 from the year before. We hope to maintain this momentum to sustain an optimal outreach.

4. Maximising our impact is important but that, in and of itself, is simply not enough. While our individual efforts hold great power, true transformative change especially to tackle difficult socio-legal problems only comes with collaboration and partnerships. As someone famously quipped "one note does not make a symphony; one artist does not make an orchestra" This nicely brings me to our theme for this year – Collective Impact.

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

5. This theme emphasises the importance of collaboration and collective effort in driving meaningful social change. We recognize that the legal challenges faced by our community are complex and multifaceted. More often than not, they are a by-product of underlying social and economic difficulties. We thus require multifaceted nuanced perspectives and multi-party collaboration.
  
6. As a clear example that all of us here today can attest too, LAW @ CDC would simply not have been possible without our partners. To our longstanding partners – People's Association (PA), the Mayors' Committee of the Community Development Councils (CDCs), the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) – NUS, SMU and SUSS and the Singapore Corporate Counsel Association (SCCA), we are deeply grateful for your unwavering support and collaborative partnership.
  
7. This year, we are delighted to welcome the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) as our new partner. SASW's expertise in social work and social welfare at the national and international level, as well as their experience in providing community and social services among heartlanders will bolster and amplify our collective efforts. This curation of our combined expertise and experience will strongly position us as multi-disciplinary healing team to reach out and touch vulnerable members of our community.

8. In that same spirit and vein, today, we will witness the signing of not one, but two significant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to catalyse collaboration and like a trampoline, serve as a springboard to propel us towards greater heights.
  
9. The first MOU will align and strengthen the partnership between PBSG, the five CDCs, IHLs, SCCA, and SASW. That will pave the way for us to potentially harness our respective resources and tap into our unique strengths. This MOU will be the third of its kind, and a template for the future. We pioneered this back in 2017 with the CDCs and IHLs and then in 2020, our corporate counsel friends from the SCCA joined our cause. Fast forward to today, we now have trained social service professionals who are SASW coming onboard to offer a multidisciplinary offering. As diverse as we are, when we converge with the common goal of creating positive change, we exemplify the spirit of collective impact. In short, being like-minded, impelled by compassion and united in a common purpose. We look forward to a symbiotic partnership with all our partners in days ahead.
  
10. This year's Law Awareness Weeks will be a unique and enriching experience as we delve into an array of compelling, practically requested topics through physical talks and webinars. These topics reflect the diversity and complexity of legal issues faced by our community. We will explore anchor subjects such as advanced legal planning on wills, family violence, divorce matters, neighbourly conflicts and more recently, how to deal with creditors and spotting and avoiding scams. Another continuing, practical issue is workplace harassment, which is as timely and apt

today as more employees return to their workplaces. To provide comprehensive and holistic insights on these socio-legal problems, we are honoured to have social workers from SASW who will imbue their psychosocial perspectives on many of these topics. By incorporating their valuable insights, we tackle complex problems by broader and deeper multidisciplinary skillsets that will pave the way for bespoke solutions.

### **Legal Clinics**

11. Another crucial aspect of PBSG's outreach efforts is our legal clinics. The second MOU we will be inking today is between PBSG and the five CDCs for the Community Legal Pro Bono Services Network for CDC. This will be the fourth edition of the MOU. It crystallises our unwavering commitment to enhancing access to justice and legal support for our community members in need. Since 2014, our partnership has helped more than 23,000 applicants at our Community Legal Clinics (CLCs). Our legal clinics will continue to be a real time resource for individuals who seek legal help.

12. We are also incredibly humbled by the launch of PBSG's Community Law Centre in January this year. Hosted by Tian De Temple in Hougang, it is our first branch office on the ground and in the heartlands. Since the launch, our Community Law Centre has aided 791 applicants. This is a practical, proactive active legal healing intervention by the PBSG team in partnership with Social Service Agencies in the

locale. Together, we collectively reach out and touch the unserved and underserved vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society.

### **Volunteer Appreciation**

13. All this is only feasible because our partners and volunteers have joined hearts and hands with us.

14. We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all the volunteer lawyers and anchor law firms who have dedicated their time, talent, treasure and ties to our legal clinics. With your unwavering commitment to justice and equality, you have provided vital legal assistance and guidance to those who could not afford it otherwise. We are happy to share that as of October 2023, we have more than 1500 registered lawyers volunteering at these clinics. This is a 11% increase from 2021.

15. Let me also specifically thank the countless volunteer speakers and moderators who have been instrumental in bringing our Law Awareness Week to life. I cannot single each of you out. Thank you also for adding your passion combined with your altruistic energy to fire up and inspire our attendees and sow the seeds to foster an atmosphere of community connection.

16. Last but not least, our deepest appreciation goes out to our partners, People's Association, the CDCs, IHLs (NUS, SMU and SUSS), SCCA and now SASW, for another fruitful year of Law Awareness Week.

## **Conclusion**

17. The potential and power of collective impact cannot be overstated. In a world where threats of fragmentation, parochialism and isolationism loom in the air, we can set a new standard by intentionally choosing interconnectedness and interdependence. The power of collective impact will enable us to tackle complex socio-legal problems by broad and deep multidisciplinary skillsets to develop bespoke solutions. Through collaborations like the ones forged here today, we maximise our individual and holistic potential to leave a lasting impact in the legal literacy landscape in Singapore.

18. Through the various talks, webinars and outreach activities we have planned, we will continue to strengthen our community through legal empowerment.

19. Thank you for attending this event once again. I wish you an enriching and edifying  
LAW @ CDC 2023!