Distinguished guests,

It is a privilege to join you on such a significant day. I want to begin by offering my warmest congratulations to you all. Being called to the Roll of Solicitors is no small feat - it is the result of your determination, your resilience, and today you take your place in this profession. Well done.

I was asked today to speak briefly on the theme of law as a public service. But I want to take that a step further. Because to me, law isn’t just a public service – it’s a *people service.* And that’s a distinction I have come to appreciate deeply in my role as Chief Executive of the Legal Aid Board.

At the Legal Aid Board, our job is to make sure that access to justice isn’t just reserved for those who can afford a solicitor. We operate a national service with 572 staff, for people who would otherwise be locked out of the legal system altogether – people who are navigating family breakdown, domestic abuse, child protection proceedings, or international protection. It is intense, difficult work. But it is also some of the most meaningful work a solicitor can do.

With a yearly budget of €64 million, we help people such as a a woman trying to protect her children. A teenager facing deportation. Simply put, what we do matters, because what we do changes lives. And we have changed more than a half million lives for the better since our establishment in 1979.

Let me give you an example.

Earlier this week I spoke with one of our solicitors who had just completed an interim care order case. He had been contacted by Sarah, a young mother of three children, after Tusla had issued an application for Interim Care Orders. Sarah was immediately provided with an appointment with one of our solicitors. Our solicitor ensured that Sarah understood the seriousness of the case, the Court process and her legal rights. It was possible for the children to be temporarily looked after by extended family members while Sarah got the help that she needed. Ultimately, the Court ruled that the children could be returned to her care, under a Supervision Order and an appropriate support package was put in place.

And we see cases just like this one every day.

We have 144 solicitors directly employed by the Legal Aid Board. Together, we help thousands of people every year. Most of our solicitors work in either family law or international protection – spaces that not just demands legal skill, but an ability to sit with people at their lowest moments. There is no fanfare. No glamour. Just steady, deeply human work. And it is work that many of you will be well suited to.

The Legal Aid Board is always looking for people who want to practise law with that mindset – whether as in-house solicitors or as members of our private practitioner panels. We offer the chance to do high-quality legal work in complex, sensitive areas, and to see the impact of your work up close. But even if you never set foot in one of our offices, I hope you’ll carry with you an instinct for empathy, for fairness, and for what justice feels like to the person relying on it.

Let me give you another example from our work in assisted decision making.

Peter was just 52 when he suffered a cardiac arrest. As a result of the cardiac arrest, Peter suffered a significant brain injury.

Peter engaged the Legal Aid Board to help him. He said the following:

“I did not understand the reason for the hospital’s application. Over the past two years I had made good and right decisions. I contacted the Legal Aid Board and was appointed a solicitor, Peadar. He visited me at the hospital several times during the Court process. I told Peadar I didn’t want the hospital making my decisions but wanted my sister appointed, even though the hospital had said it would be too difficult for her. Peadar has been nothing but positive and has supported me through this so well. He explained everything to me. Not everyone gets the opportunity to get back your control but I did and that was because of Peadar’s help. Thank you I can’t say enough how grateful I am to have had the support I have.”

That sense of gratitude is something many of us in this profession can relate to.

The law has always had a dual identity – it is a profession, and it is a vocation. You will of course be focused now on careers, on CPD and on firm placements. After my many years as a solicitor, what has really motivated me is purpose. Knowing that the law is not just what you do – it is what you use, on behalf of others. The privilege of this profession is that you will be trusted – often with the hardest moments in someone’s life. And that trust is not just earned through legal knowledge, but through empathy, clarity and care. These are not soft skills; they are professional strengths. And they are what set great solicitors apart.

I will give one final example of our work in this area, that was recently in the Court of Appeal.

This case concerned a Palestinian family separated after the father moved with the children from Sweden to Ireland, where he sought international protection. The mother, who remained in Sweden, brought child abduction proceedings and initially succeeded in the High Court. Smithfield Law Centre represented the mother, while Castlebar Law Centre acted for the father and appealed the decision. The Court of Appeal ultimately found that the mother had acquiesced in the children’s relocation, based on her actions over time. It declined to order their return to Sweden, preserving the children’s current stability.

The case really highlights the vital role of our Legal Aid Board solicitors in calmly navigating complex cross-border family disputes and always listening intently to their clients.

I will end with this final comment. Often, your clients won’t remember every legal argument. But they will remember how you made them feel. Whether they felt heard. Whether they felt safe. Whether someone stood beside them when it mattered.

So, congratulations again – on everything you’ve achieved and all that lies ahead for you. The profession is richer for having you in it – and I wish you all the very best, and, above all, I wish you purpose as you begin your career.

Thank you.

**ENDS**