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Forum Editor,
The Straits Times
Singapore Press Holdings
News Centre 1000 Toa Payoh North
Podium Level 2 Singapore 318994

Via Email and Fax No
6319 8289

Dear Sir,

SMALL LAW FIRMS A NECESSITY FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

We refer to the article titled "For law firms, size does matter" published recently in the *Sunday Times*.

The writer defines small law firms ("SLFs") as those with fewer than six lawyers and portrayed them as less competent and honest than its larger brethren. These generalisations are not only unconstructive but also erroneous.

Firstly, there are 671 SLFs in Singapore, which amounts to approximately 87 per cent of all law firms in Singapore. It would be an error to treat all SLFs generally as one homogeneous class with the same disposition.

Secondly, there are many reasons why SLFs exist. Lawyers may form or join SLFs so that they are able to concentrate on the work they like. Further, SLFs are by nature more flexible and nimble. They are also frequently their own bosses and have more control over their time. Many SLFs have also contributed back to the society at large by doing pro bono work which would be impossible if they "have insufficient resources".

When the man on the street is faced with legal problem, chances are he will approach a small firm, ironically because of the size. These SLFs are able to offer the client personalised services. The importance of SLFs was also acknowledged by our Chief Justice when he said "they supply vital and affordable legal services and access to justice to all rungs of society" in his speech at the Opening of Legal Year 2009.

The article also discusses the Group Law Practice scheme ("GLP") which allows SLFs to form associations with other SLFs with each having its own area of practice. They retain the benefits of the SLFs and enjoy benefits of a larger network. GLP would, collectively, provide a full range of legal services. The concept is relatively new and it needs time to develop. It should not be dismissed outright as unsuccessful.

Finally, 'small', 'medium' and 'large' are comparative only terms. The assertion that big equals honest and small equals dishonest is irrational. Integrity depends on individual. Whether a person is honest or not is part of his moral fibre. It is not determined by the size of the firm which employs them. No amount of layers of checks or legislation would deter a person intent on committing fraud.



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The Law Society and its Small Law Firms Committee recognise the problems created by a very small minority and are conscious that these problems need to be addressed. However, broad brush sweeping statements and generalisations can do more harm than good. In every profession there are a few who fall prey to temptation. Whilst not condoning such conduct, we should not condemn the vast majority who do good work.



Shawn Toh
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for Small Law Firms Committee
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