

STATE COURTS WORKPLAN 2017
ADVANCING JUSTICE: EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
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17 March 2017

Fellow Judges, ladies and gentlemen:

Introduction

1. A very warm welcome to the State Courts Workplan 2017. Some of you joined me earlier to witness the commencement of the next chapter in the construction of the new State Courts Towers, as we commemorated the launch of building works on the superstructure. I am delighted to note that the construction works are progressing according to schedule. We look forward to operating from the new Towers in 2020.

2. Our Workplan theme this year is *Advancing Justice: Expanding the Possibilities*. This encapsulates our enduring quest to provide the public with meaningful access to justice by constantly improving, innovating and evolving our court initiatives and programs. This is entirely in line with some observations I made last week at the launch of the Law Society Mediation Scheme, when I suggested that we should recognise the reality that access to justice is an

essential element of our conception of the Rule of Law. And so, over the years, we have introduced a wide range of initiatives to address some of the significant challenges that users of the State Courts might encounter in seeking justice. This year is no different, and later in my address, I will introduce our new initiatives that will be launched.

3. I would like, however, to begin by taking a few minutes to reflect on what advancing justice means to us, and to situate it within the specific context in which we, at the State Courts, operate.

Advancing justice

4. The primary function of the State Courts is to dispense justice and uphold the rule of law. To do so, we must facilitate meaningful access to justice. Presently, we deal with around 90% of the judicial caseload in Singapore. Within our court system, the State Courts can be said to form the “base of the pyramid”. For the man in the street, the encounter with the justice system commonly takes place here. We must therefore remain committed to seeking ways to ensure that no segment of society is excluded from the means by which they may vindicate their legitimate rights or grievances through the court system, whether such exclusion is threatened by a lack of financial means or legal knowledge or access to legal assistance or anything else.

Broadening the Base of the Pyramid

5. In his influential and best-selling book¹, Thomas Friedman theorised more than a decade ago that our world is, in a figurative sense, flattening. Professor Gillian Hadfield² examines this idea in the context of the legal landscape but she argues in her recent book³ that while the economic world may seem to be increasingly flat, our legal infrastructure is not. In fact, it is getting ever more remote from the realities of our globalised world. A major reason for this is the rising complexity of the new global digital economy and the proliferation of rules, regulations and legal practices that are needed to manage this. This leads in turn to greater cost and complexity in legal infrastructure, hence exacerbating the risk of the law becoming yet more inaccessible. She argues that if the law fails to remain simple, comprehensible, and openly responsive to the needs of a wide range of people who need to access it, then certain segments of society may well choose (or feel compelled) to ignore it, and not seek to access justice. As she puts it: *“people who feel as though the rules don’t care about them don’t care about the rules”*. If a significant proportion of the population are thereby excluded and live outside the umbrella of the rule of law, the law would have lost much of its legitimacy and effectiveness.

¹ *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (2005, Farrar, Straus and Giroux),

² Richard L. and Antoinette Schamoi Kirtland Professor of Law and Professor of Economics at the University of Southern California, USC Gould School of Law

³ *Rules for a Flat World: Why Humans Invented Law and How to Reinvent It for a Complex Global Economy*, (2016, Oxford University Press).

6. We, in the State Courts, have constantly kept in mind the vital importance of ensuring that our courts deliver justice that is accessible, affordable and effective. Ordinary citizens must be able to access the legal processes, tools and remedies that are essential to supporting them in their core pursuits. These include the protection of their own property, obtaining due compensation for their work, and enforcing their rights as consumers of goods and services. We must therefore keep thinking about how we can enhance the prospects of ensuring that justice is accessible not just for the privileged few, but for *all* who seek it.

Promoting Access to Justice

7. As a concept, access to justice is multi-faceted⁴. The first and possibly the most obvious facet of this would be procedural access to justice. This is essentially the ability to invoke and participate in the process of justice. The second facet is substantive access to justice. This involves the ability to obtain a fair and effective outcome. The third and final facet is symbolic access to justice. This involves ensuring that users of the justice system perceive that they are being fairly treated and accorded due respect and recognition by the system.

⁴Bond, Wiseman and Bates, *The Cost of Uncertainty: Navigating the Boundary Between Legal Information and Legal Services in the Access to Justice Sector*, Journal of Law and Social Policy 25 (2016): 1-25

8. Over the years, the State Courts have sought to introduce a wide range of initiatives to promote access to justice in all its facets. Reviewing these, a number of common drivers that underpin the majority of them can be identified. There are three that are relevant to my remarks this morning:

- a. First, providing affordable, accessible and effective court processes;
- b. Second, collaborating with stakeholders to improve substantive outcomes; and
- c. Third, supporting litigants and improving service excellence.

9. I propose to use this Workplan as an occasion to provide a stocktake of some of the steps we have taken so far in each of these respects, and to signpost what we will be doing in the near future.

First driver: providing affordable, accessible and effective court processes

10. It is plainly of utmost importance that our processes are and remain affordable, accessible and effective. We have made significant strides in this area, with 99.6% of the respondents in the recent State Courts Public Perception Survey 2016 expressing a high level of confidence that the State

Courts provide an effective justice system; and a further 98.7% affirming that the State Courts provide excellent court services.

11. One aspect, of which we have taken special cognisance, is the realisation that the traditional adversarial litigation process is not necessarily optimal for all cases. Certain categories of cases can benefit from a different approach to dispute resolution.

12. Over the years, we have been a strong proponent of Alternative Dispute Resolution (“ADR”). I have said, on more than one occasion, and most recently, just last week, that ADR, being a consensual means of resolving a dispute, offers one of the best ways to enhance access to justice. Since the mid-1990s, ADR has been actively promoted by the State Courts. In 2010, ADR was made compulsory for motor accident cases and since 2012, there has been a presumption in favour of ADR in all civil cases.

13. Two years ago, we signalled our commitment to adopting ADR as a core dispute resolution strategy when we established the State Courts Centre for Dispute Resolution (“SCCDR”) in March 2015. The SCCDR is now a stand-alone justice division of the State Courts, handling both civil and criminal ADR for matters originating within the State Courts.

14. And just last year, we further enhanced the provision of ADR services at the SCCDR by launching the Counsellors @ SCCDR Scheme. This involves having a trained counsellor or psychologist present at the mediation session in selected cases, to help the parties identify and address their entrenched emotional conflicts.

15. We were also an organising partner of the inaugural Global Pound Conference series. The series was initiated by the International Mediation Institute and we were honoured to be chosen from amongst 30 competing cities to host the very first instalment in the series in March last year. The Conference was well-received, providing an invaluable opportunity for ADR practitioners and users to collectively shape the future of dispute resolution by sharing insights and exchanging views on many cutting-edge ideas.

WP 2017 initiative: Online Dispute Resolution Platform for Motor Accident Claims

16. While we have come a long way in institutionalising ADR within the courts, we continue to think of how we can further enhance our ADR services to achieve better outcomes for our court users. To that end, the State Courts will be embarking on the development of an Online Dispute Resolution (“ODR”) platform for motor accident claims. The ODR platform seeks to harness the benefits of technology by providing an online system for parties to resolve their

disputes quickly, more efficiently and at lower cost. This will be undertaken as part of the “Courts of the Future” project, jointly undertaken by the Supreme Court, the State Courts, the Family Justice Courts and GovTech (formerly the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA)) to identify technology opportunities that can support the strategic direction of the Singapore Judiciary and help us meet the future needs of our users over a 5- to- 10-year time horizon.

17. It is apt to commence the development of the ODR platform with motor accident claims because these account for a very significant proportion, around a third, of all civil writs filed in the State Courts annually. Furthermore, over the years, ADR has proven to be an extremely effective means for resolving motor accident claims. Since ADR was mandated for motor accident claims in 2010, an average of 92% of cases referred to ADR annually have ended in settlement.

18. A key component of the ODR platform that is currently being explored is the outcome simulator. This will be launched in Phase 1, which is targeted for the first quarter of 2019. The outcome simulator generates possible outcomes using algorithms appropriate for the parameters and data provided by the parties. The likely outcomes will be derived using logic-based rules from information and data recorded in the electronic Motor Accident Guide (eMAG), the Lexis Nexis Assessment of Damages book, precedent cases and historical data. Having been apprised of the likely outcomes, parties will hopefully be able

to engage in more meaningful settlement discussions, and be better placed to decide on their best course of action.

19. Phase 2, which is targeted for end-2019, will comprise the e-settlement platform and online mediation. E-settlement will entail an online exchange of settlement proposals by parties, with the system recommending a settlement amount based on parties' inputs as well as the results generated by the outcome simulator. Online mediation, on the other hand, contemplates online judge-facilitated negotiations for more complex cases which the parties are unable to resolve on their own.

20. I am hopeful that in time to come, the ODR platform can be scaled up and adapted for use in a wider range of disputes adjudicated by our courts, thereby providing a virtual environment for parties to participate actively and constructively in the management and progress of all their cases. This will reduce the need for physical facilities or face-to-face meetings.

21. On a related development, let me highlight an ongoing collaboration between the Supreme Court, the State Courts and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) SPIRIT Centre on a proof-of-concept study to develop an Intelligent Case Retrieval System. This will incorporate Artificial Intelligence, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Data Analytics features, with the aim of producing a sophisticated legal research, advisory and decision support tool

that enables the efficient and effective retrieval of relevant case precedents, through machine learning of key court documents and judgments from decided cases. The goal is to use technology to sharpen the decision making process of our judges. This translational Research & Development project is funded by the Smart Nation (Trans) Grant awarded to NTU, and supported by GovTech, for the proof-of-concept stage. As a start, the focus will be on road traffic accidents and personal injury matters. I look forward to updates on the progress of this project in due course.

WP 2017 initiative: Court-Annexed Alternative Dispute Resolution Programme

22. Still on ADR, in view of the significant successes we have achieved in using and institutionalising ADR, we think it is timely to promote the State Courts brand of court-annexed ADR, both locally and internationally. Our brand of ADR includes facilitative, evaluative, directive and transformative mediation, as well as Neutral Evaluation techniques, tailored to meet the needs of the different types of disputes that we deal with. It is a distinct brand that has evolved and grown since Court ADR was first piloted in 1994 for selected civil cases. We plan to do this by establishing a specialised SCCDR team to provide court-annexed ADR training for our judicial officers, court administrators, volunteer mediators and others such as lawyers and foreign judges who might be interested.

23. We will begin by intensifying internal training efforts for State Courts judges, court administrators and volunteer mediators and, among other offerings, a 2-day course for judges with an interest in court annexed judge-led ADR will be held in the fourth quarter of this year. Where appropriate, we will seek to partner the Singapore Judicial College, the Civil Service College, the Singapore Mediation Centre and other strong training institutions to conduct a variety of Court ADR programmes both locally and internationally. In the longer term, we will also consider the provision of structured consultancy services to advise interested foreign judiciaries on the implementation or enhancement of court-annexed ADR infrastructure and capabilities.

24. We are confident that the introduction of the Court-annexed ADR Programme will enrich the ADR eco-system and reinforce Singapore's status as a dispute resolution hub.

25. Another area where we have devoted significant efforts in promoting access to justice involves the resolution of community and relational disputes and small value claims. Because these disputes involve a court user base that primarily comprises litigants-in-person, the court processes in place to deal with such cases must adequately recognise this fact. It was with this in mind that in April 2015, the Community Justice and Tribunals Division ("CJTD") was established. The CJTD currently comprises the Small Claims Tribunals ("SCT") and the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals ("CDRT"). It also hears

matters under the Protection from Harassment Act (“POHA”) and from April 2017, it will incorporate the Employment Claims Tribunals (“ECT”). These tribunals each deal with discrete areas of law but they share the common goal of providing an expeditious and affordable forum for parties to resolve their disputes. Conciliatory resolution of such disputes using ADR processes will be emphasised. Where matters cannot be resolved consensually, they will be adjudicated in a tribunal setting with simplified processes geared towards facilitating self-representation.

26. As it stands, the processes in the CJTD are designed to be easy for the litigant-in-person to follow. This must be so because parties are unrepresented in the majority of cases handled there. In fact, in the Small Claims Tribunals, lawyers are specifically excluded and parties must present their case themselves.

WP 2017 initiative: Short Mediation and Hearing in the Small Claims Tribunals

27. The SCT has been in existence for more than 30 years and much of the work processes are well-established. Despite this, there will always be areas for change and improvement. In this connection, a programme aimed at fast-tracking certain SCT cases to minimise the number of court attendances required of the parties is scheduled to be rolled out later this year. Currently, it typically takes as many as three or four court attendances from the time a case

is filed at the SCT to when it will be brought to a final conclusion. There is no practice of differentiating cases to allow simple cases to be fast-tracked. This seems unsatisfactory for factually simple cases with no complex legal issues. With such cases in mind, the SCT has come up with a new Short Mediation and Hearing (“SMAH”) process. The objective of the SMAH is to resolve these cases expeditiously by reducing the number of court attendances, if possible, to just a single one.

28. Once a case is filed, it will be screened and where suitable, placed on this expedited track. Such cases will then be fixed for the parties to attend before a Duty Assistant Registrar (“Duty AR”). The Duty AR will give the necessary directions and where appropriate direct the matter to a short mediation. Where this is done, the mediation will take place forthwith. Should the matter be settled, a consent order will be recorded before the Duty AR. If the parties are unable to settle but are ready to proceed for hearing, the Duty AR will arrange for the case to be heard by a Referee on the same day, or at the very latest, within 24 hours. In a typical SMAH case, the parties should be able to either settle or have their matter heard and adjudicated all in the same day.

29. This will benefit the parties who will no longer need to prepare a summary for hearing. It will also minimise their court attendances. Beyond the parties, this will also allow us to allocate more resources to the more complex cases while the straightforward ones are disposed of quickly. Ultimately, this should

translate into shorter waiting times for the parties even as the case load of the SCT increases.

30. The SMAH draws its inspiration from a similar programme introduced by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunals in Australia. The pilot phase of the SMAH approach was concluded towards the end of 2016. The SCT will analyse the statistics arising from this pilot and review how the process can be further refined. We expect to officially implement this sometime in the third quarter of this year.

Second driver: collaborating with stakeholders to improve substantive outcomes

31. I turn to the second driver that undergirds the various initiatives we have introduced and will be introducing in the coming years. The State Courts are but one of the many players in the justice system. The success of the justice system depends significantly on the synergy between its various stakeholders. We have always enjoyed a good working relationship with our stakeholders. In the recently concluded State Courts Stakeholders and Strategic Partners Survey 2016, 99% of the respondents expressed an overall high level of satisfaction with our collaborative efforts; and 96.8% indicated that collaboration with the State Courts has fostered an open and trusting relationship with, and has also had a positive impact on, their organisations. We should continue to build upon

these excellent results and actively explore and pursue more collaborative opportunities with our stakeholders in our efforts to broaden access to justice.

32. One aspect of this relates to how our partners can help us to carry out our mission more effectively. For instance, the State Courts as a neutral arbiter of disputes must maintain the requisite distance and neutrality from the parties. Yet the disputants often approach our staff for legal advice. While our staff may be very familiar with the workings of the law, they are not in a position to render legal advice to the parties. Through our collaboration with our partners, we can now refer the parties to the appropriate agencies. As you know, we house one such agency here, the Community Justice Centre (“CJC”). Many of you will recall that in 2010, two HELP (“Helping to Empower Litigants-in-Person”) Centres were established – one in the then Subordinate Courts and the other in the then Family and Juvenile Justice Division. With the continuing increase of litigants-in-person, a one-stop hub able to provide greater integration of legal aid and social assistance to such persons was deemed necessary. This led to the genesis of the CJC in 2012.

33. The CJC was the result of close collaboration between the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Ministry of Law, the State Courts, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation and the Law Society of Singapore. It provides a wide range of support services for litigants-in-person as well as their family members.

Free legal advice is provided at their on-site legal clinics, and the CJC also provides free practical and emotional support.

34. Shortly after its establishment, I announced at the 2013 Workplan that the State Courts would collaborate with the CJC and the Law Society to set up the Primary Justice Project (“PJP”). The PJP is modelled after the primary healthcare provider in the healthcare industry. It serves as an interim step between self-help and legal action to resolve a dispute. I am gratified to note that many lawyers have stepped forward to volunteer their services under the auspices of the PJP. These lawyers provide basic legal services for lower value civil and family matters, and facilitate the settlement of a dispute for a fixed fee. The fees are kept low so as to ensure that the largest possible spectrum of litigants-in-person are able to afford it.

35. The PJP currently covers those civil claims with a value of less than \$60,000, but which fall outside the jurisdiction of the SCT. These include claims for breach of contract, defamation, consumer claims, tenancy disputes, MCST disputes and employment disputes. From 1 April 2017, the coverage of the PJP will include harassment cases and neighbour disputes filed in the CJTD. It will also be extended to cases that fall within the jurisdiction of the SCT. I welcome this enlargement of the scope of the PJP and am hopeful that this will allow more of our court users to avail themselves of its services.

36. The State Courts will also continue to work with the CJC to strengthen its role in promoting public education and awareness of the justice system and court processes. In particular, this aims to assist litigants-in-person who are required by law to represent themselves at some of our Tribunals.

WP 2017 initiative: Victim Assistance Scheme (“VAS”)

37. The CJC has done much to alleviate the emotional distress and confusion that many litigants-in-person and their families face once they get embroiled in court proceedings. I am pleased to announce that this year, the State Courts will collaborate with the CJC and the Singapore Police Force on another meaningful initiative to help ease this distress. This initiative focuses on the victims of crime – a group which has not previously been specifically singled out for attention and, unsurprisingly, it is called the Victim Assistance Scheme or VAS. We expect to implement this next month.

38. The VAS strives to reduce some of the financial burdens that victims of criminal assault who have not been compensated by the offender may suffer. Specifically, such victims can now claim the medical fees they have incurred as a result of their physical injuries where the offender is unable for some reason to compensate them. The VAS will be administered by the CJC and a fund has been set up to cater to the needs of these victims. The claims will be limited to medical fees and be capped at \$1000. The victim will be referred by the court

to the CJC for the claim to be assessed, provided that certain qualifying criteria are met. These include the following:

- a. that the offender has already been convicted of an offence of assault; and
- b. no prior compensation has been or is likely to be made whether voluntarily or pursuant to a compensation order.

39. With the VAS, victims of assaults who are left uncompensated because of the impecuniosity of accused persons, will be afforded a means to obtain reimbursement for at least their medical expenses. We are grateful to the CJC and the Singapore Police Force for their support and we will work with them to make any required improvements along the way.

40. Next, I turn to the area of community justice. This is a prime area for co-operation with our stakeholders because the issues encountered extend well beyond the reach of the courts. The Community Court, which deals with youth offenders and with community-related issues, such as neighbour disputes, has rolled out several initiatives together with its stakeholders since its inception in 2006. In 2014, for instance, the Progress Accountability Court was established within the Community Court. It created a new framework for the Court to play a post-sentencing role that focused on the rehabilitation and restoration for offenders. This came about through close co-operation with the Ministry of

Home Affairs, the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Singapore Prison Service.

41. At last year's Workplan, I announced our collaboration with the Singapore After-Care Association on the pre-sentence protocol adopted by the Community Court. This entails offenders taking voluntary action to set their lives back on the right track, such as by receiving treatment, counselling, or undergoing certain programmes, before they are sentenced. This aims to address and resolve the underlying issues that are at the root of the offending behaviour. The court will take into consideration the offender's progress before passing sentence. Since its inception in March last year, we have expanded our scope of collaboration to also include the National Addiction Management Service ("NAMS"). Collaboration with NAMS has enabled the referral of suitable offenders to them for treatment of their various addictions including to drugs, alcohol or gambling.

WP 2017 initiative: On-site Psychological Services

42. Outside of the criminal process, the CJTD also handles a significant number of community justice cases in the form of harassment cases and neighbour disputes. From their experience in handling such matters, the CJTD has noted that a number of those involved in such cases exhibit signs suggesting that they may be suffering from psychiatric illnesses or personality

disorders. These might have a direct causal link to the commission of the offending acts. Until and unless these underlying illnesses or disorders are addressed, it will likely prove to be an uphill task for the parties to resolve their dispute. Even if the court makes an order against the offending party, securing compliance may be difficult if the litigant is suffering from an untreated illness or disorder.

43. Unlike the Criminal Procedure Code, the POHA and the Community Disputes Resolution Act do not empower the court to remand these litigants at the Institute of Mental Health (“IMH”) for psychiatric assessment and treatment. What the court can do, however, is to order the litigants to undergo counselling, and to give the necessary directions for carrying into effect such counselling orders. For any counselling order to be meaningful and effective, it is necessary that any underlying illness or disorder be diagnosed and addressed.

44. With that in mind, the CJTD, in tandem with IMH, embarked on a nine-month pilot project in July 2016 to have on-site mental health services at CJTD’s premises. An IMH doctor was stationed there one morning a week, with two to three cases scheduled each morning. The doctor was supported by an off-site Clinical Administrator and Case Manager. The CJTD referred suitable litigants to the on-site IMH doctor for consultation and assessment. There was no cost to the litigants for the consultation with the on-site IMH doctor, although if they were subsequently referred to the IMH for further treatment, they would pay

subsidised rates. As at 28 February 2017, the State Courts made 19 referrals and of those, 15 were preliminarily diagnosed as having a psychiatric illness or personality disorder.

45. After the pilot phase ends on 31 March 2017, the CJTD expects to officially launch this initiative once budgetary approval and procurement processes have been completed. By being proactive in taking a multi-disciplinary and problem-solving approach to resolving such cases, litigants are assured that the outcomes they obtain are enduring and effective. From a community health perspective, it is also beneficial as it serves to detect mental illness within the community and ensures that patients receive treatment as early as possible.

WP 2017 initiative: Sentencing Conference 2017

46. Dealing with cases involving offenders who suffer from mental illnesses can be among the most challenging tasks for a judge. In sentencing, a balance has to be struck between the societal need for punishment, deterrence and retribution and the offender's special circumstances. This is but one of the many issues that we encounter in the course of deciding on the appropriate sentence for a particular case. It is important that judges, prosecutors, lawyers and anyone with a stake in the criminal justice system keep abreast of the latest

developments in sentencing. There is much to learn from one another, as well as from our international counterparts.

47. It was for these reasons that the State Courts, together with the Singapore Academy of Law (“SAL”), organised the inaugural Sentencing Conference in October 2014. The first run of the Conference was a great success and we received much positive feedback. Three years down the road, we think it is time to hold the second run of this Conference. We will be doing so, in collaboration with the SAL once again, on 26 and 27 October 2017, at the Supreme Court auditorium.

48. The Conference will provide a valuable forum for stakeholders in the criminal justice system as well as our counterparts from abroad to share ideas and discuss issues relevant to sentencing. For this instalment, some of the topics that are expected to be discussed include the reintegration of offenders into society, the importance of consistency in sentencing, community-based sentences as well as considerations that affect the sentencing of offenders with mental disorders.

WP 2017 initiative: Improving Court Volunteer Engagement and Recognition

49. I would like to turn our attention from other agencies to a special group of people with whom we work very closely, and who have been very gracious in

giving their time to serve our court users. These are our court volunteers. The SCCDR for instance presently engages the services of some 84 volunteer mediators, including both lawyers and non-lawyers, as well as Justices of the Peace who mediate civil, community and criminal disputes at the SCCDR. They are indispensable to the smooth running of the SCCDR.

50. We recognise that the SCCDR volunteer mediators are a valuable resource for us to tap on. To keep them engaged, the SCCDR will be implementing various initiatives to enhance the volunteer mediators' scheme. One of these involves incentivising our volunteer mediators to improve their skills through learning. The SCCDR will explore the viability of becoming a registered service provider with the Singapore International Mediation Institute ("SIMI"). This would enable volunteer mediators to advance their SIMI accreditation through mediating SCCDR cases. The SCCDR will also explore the creation of a higher tier of mediators for outstanding volunteer mediators, who will be accorded a different title to differentiate them from the rest. This select group of volunteer mediators will also be placed on a special panel to co-mediate selected complex cases with a Judicial Officer from the SCCDR.

51. To foster continued interest in volunteering their services, we will also broaden the range of cases which volunteer mediators are assigned and offer specialised training programmes for them.

52. I should note that our SCCDR volunteer mediators form a sub-set of approximately 170 court volunteers who are jointly managed by the SCCDR and CJTD. Our other court volunteers include volunteer mediators and referees assisting at the SCT. In addition to the enhancement of the volunteer mediators scheme, we will concurrently develop a Court Volunteers' Portal to serve as a common resource for all our court volunteers. This portal will be housed on the State Courts corporate website and will include reference materials, announcements on upcoming events, archives of past events, FAQs and so on. This will allow all our volunteers to access information that is relevant to them through one online location. In this way, we hope to foster a sense of belonging among our volunteers and also to show them in a tangible way that we deeply value their contributions.

Third driver: supporting litigants and improving service excellence

53. I mentioned at the start of my Address that the over-arching goal of the State Courts as a primary dispenser of justice in Singapore is to ensure that justice is accessible to all. For litigants-in-person who are unfamiliar with how to handle their cases, the justice system can seem alien and daunting. The third driver that spurs the work we do is therefore of especial importance, and it is to support litigants and achieve excellence in our service standards.

54. Accused persons facing criminal proceedings are a particular group of court users to whom we have always endeavoured to render as much assistance as we can, without undermining our neutrality. We are fully aware that being charged with a criminal offence is a difficult and at times traumatic experience for the accused person, especially when he may not have the benefit of legal advice. Recognising this, the Guidance for Plea (“GPS”) Scheme was launched in 2013, in partnership with the Association of Muslim Lawyers and the Association of Criminal Lawyers of Singapore. Under the Scheme, Judges can call upon this pool of volunteer lawyers at short notice to render advice to unrepresented accused persons so that they can make an informed decision as to whether to plead guilty. In 2015, in partnership with the CJC, the Scheme was expanded to include certain other categories of cases and it was brought upstream to include the PTC and mentions courts. In that way, more accused persons were able to access the Scheme at an earlier stage of the proceedings.

55. We have also taken steps to ensure that witnesses are well taken care of. The Witness Support Scheme was established in 2013, and aims to familiarise witnesses with the court environment and court processes. Referrals to the Scheme can be made through the court by prosecutors, defence counsel or the Investigation Officer. Apart from briefings on their role and court procedures, information on counselling and social services is made available to

witnesses. Through the Scheme, witnesses should be better-equipped to give evidence in court and also to handle the stress of being a witness.

56. In the context of criminal matters, many of you would have heard of the Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (“ICMS”), which was launched in 2013. The ICMS is an electronic e-filing and e-workflow case management system for the criminal courts. I announced at last year’s Workplan that Phase 2 of the ICMS was being developed and would involve accused persons being given access to the system. I am pleased to note that this has now been rolled out and accused persons, whether represented or not, now can access ICMS using Singpass. This enables them to view their electronic case files and also to submit applications and upload documents relevant to their case online.

WP 2017 initiative: Guidebook for Accused-In-Person (“GAP”)

57. While Phase 2 of ICMS allows accused persons to access critical case information online, 24/7, this presupposes that the accused person is able to access the internet and has at least a basic understanding of the legal process, the application he wishes to make, and the documents he wants to upload to his case file.

58. This will often not be the case and to help accused persons who may not have even a rudimentary understanding of how to conduct his case, the State Courts will collaborate with the CJC to produce a Guidebook for AIPs, or Accused-in-Persons. The acronym for this is “GAP”, which is apt, considering that such a Guidebook is intended to plug the informational gap that afflicts AIPs. There are already various pamphlets placed at strategic locations within the State Courts that give AIPs and their family members critical information on matters such as the first court mention and bail. The Guidebook will consolidate all of this information and provide additional information on a comprehensive list of topics such as mentions, PTCs, trial, sentencing, the appeal process and legal aid.

59. To give a broad spectrum of accused persons access to this Guidebook, it will first be made available in the English language and eventually in the other official languages. The explanations in the Guidebook will also be simple, in layman’s language and be coupled with infographics. We expect to release the Guidebook in the second half of this year.

WP 2017 initiative: Real-time Payment of Fines and Fees Using Hand-held Devices

60. Aside from the ICMS, the State Courts have continued to search for ways to leverage on technology to improve our processes and make it more user-

friendly for our court users. Last year, we rolled out the Automated Collection System (ACS) using kiosks that enable our court users to make payments through a variety of methods, including cash, cheques, cashiers' orders, NETS and credit and debit cards. We also launched the Justice@StateCourts application for smartphones and tablets. This provides information such as our hearing lists, filing instructions, contains the small claims online assessment tools, and much more.

61. Going forward, it seems a natural progression to bring fine instalment payments onto the Justice@StateCourts mobile app platform. While the ACS kiosks are convenient for our court users who happen to be here, the mobile application platform would enhance our outreach by enabling court users to pay their fines by instalments and to do so without having to come here.

62. The extension of the mobile payment platform to all fines and fees would also reduce our reliance on human resources to manage over-the-counter cash collection. We aim to complete the feasibility study on this proposal by the end of this year and to implement real-time payment of fines and fees through the State Courts mobile app by the end of next year.

WP 2017 initiative: State Courts Conversation 2020

63. The last initiative which I would like to touch on is a fitting one to end with. It weaves together the common threads of all that I have spoken about thus far. I said earlier that we will move to our new building, the State Courts Towers, in 2020. The completion of the Towers signals the beginning of a new chapter for the State Courts and with it, we have the opportunity to renew our commitment towards providing full and effective access to justice. But as we refresh our physical infrastructure, we must also review the mission, vision and values in our justice statement, as well as our strategies and corporate branding.

64. To that end, we will initiate the State Courts Conversation 2020 this year. This multi-year project will involve internal and external workshops with our staff and all stakeholders in the justice eco-system. We hope to obtain insights into how they perceive the State Courts' mission, vision and values, as well as the value proposition offered by the State Courts, against the larger landscape of the entire justice system.

65. Internally, we will hold focus group discussions for State Courts staff from the different divisions to elicit their views on the State Courts they would like to work in come 2020 and beyond. These discussions will cover their desired workplace culture, as well as how they envision delivering justice to court users,

through a series of process reviews and re-engineering. Externally, we will hold dialogues with various stakeholder groups to better understand their concerns and expectations for the State Courts. These perspectives will help shape our future delivery of services, as well as how we can better collaborate with our key stakeholders. We will also conduct interviews with senior leaders from the public and private sectors to seek their views on the future of the State Courts. Throughout the lifespan of this initiative, continuous environmental scanning, business analytics and design thinking will be woven into its workings. I invite you all to participate in this deeply meaningful initiative and have your say in shaping your future.

Conclusion

66. As I come to the end of this Workplan Address, let me reiterate something that I noted at the start. You are the face of justice for most Singaporeans. All of you are in the unique and privileged position of helping to administer justice. The State Courts are the sum of all its parts. I have spent time talking about the many projects and schemes which we have implemented or will be implementing in the coming year; but none of these would be successful without the dedicated efforts and genuine commitment of our people. No cutting-edge IT project or streamlined process innovation can be a substitute for your commitment, passion and sincerity. If we can all bear that in mind as we go

about our daily duties, I am certain that we will succeed in our endeavour to make justice accessible to all.

67. I wish all of you a successful 2017 Workplan year and a fulfilling year ahead. Thank you very much.