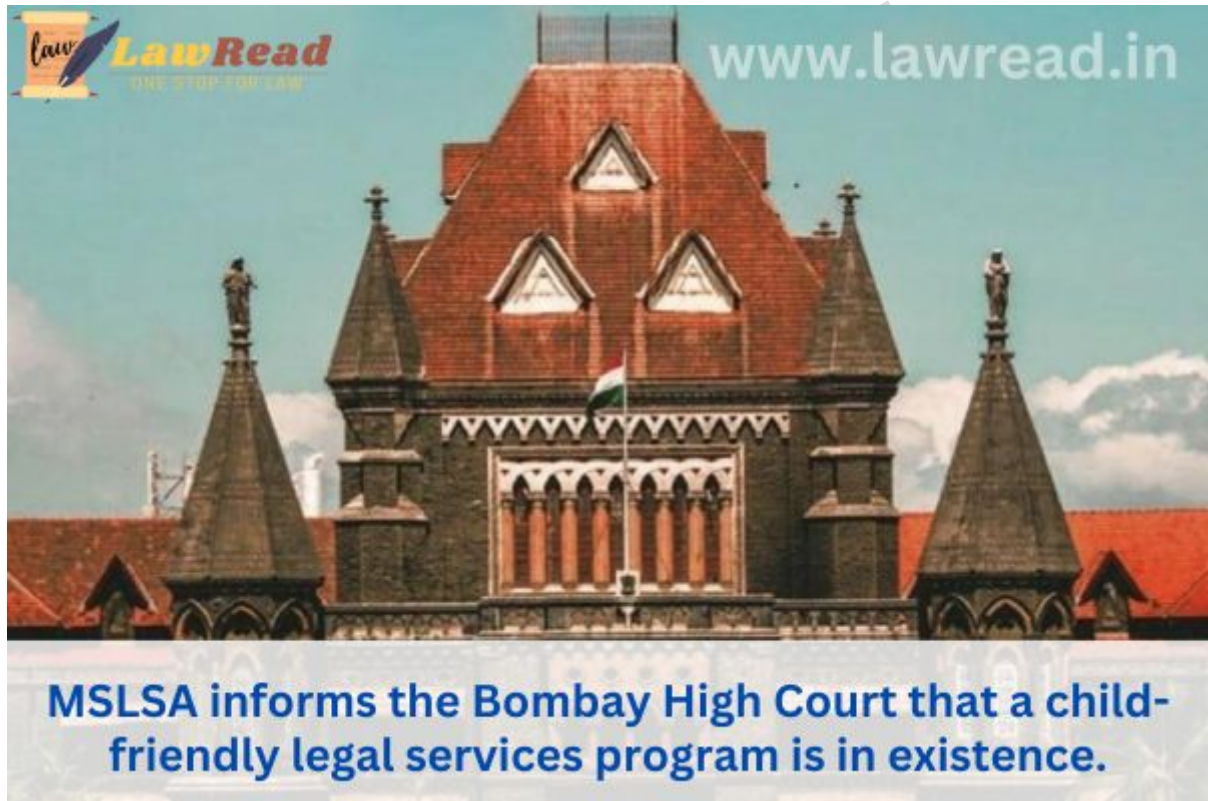


News

MSLSA informs the Bombay High Court that a child-friendly legal services program is in existence.



In order to allow minors to choose independent legal counsel in cases involving custody, visitation, and matters under the POCSO Act, the Court closed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL).

The Maharashtra State Legal Services Authority (MSLSA) announced that a comprehensive scheme addressing the issue is already in place, so the Bombay High Court on Thursday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) petition seeking a legal framework for children to choose their own attorneys in custody and family court disputes [**Shraddha Dalvi v State of Maharashtra and Ors**].

The MSLSA provided an affidavit saying that the NALSA (Child-Friendly Legal Services for

Children) Scheme, 2024, went into effect in September 2024 and is currently in operation throughout the State. Chief Justice **Alok Aradhe** and Justice **Sandeep Marne** noted this information.

By November 2024, Legal Services Units for Children (LSUCs) had been built in every district as part of the program.

According to the affidavit, District Legal Services Authorities have been educating communities and educational institutions about the initiative through outreach and awareness campaigns.

Through counsel Ashley Cusher, Mumbai attorney Shraddha Dalvi had filed the PIL before the court. It requested guidance on allowing minors to designate their own independent legal representation in situations pertaining to visitation, custody, and the Protection of minors from Sexual Offenses Act, 2012 (POCSO Act).

The petitioner made the case that children should have the freedom to voice their concerns through independent legal representation because they are frequently "silent sufferers" in family conflicts.

The Court questioned the petitioner during the hearing since she had not provided evidence to back up the allegations in her plea.

"What leads you to conclude that essential support is not given? MSLSA provides assistance when you apply. Which situation? Have you got any data? Why should we amuse if there is no data? According to the Supreme Court, the petitioner needs to conduct research and base his argument on measurable facts. The Court had declared, "This is litigation involving publicity interests."

Additionally, the Court rejected the petitioner's argument that many family court judges were ignorant of the existence of the current plan and that it had never been used.

The Maharashtra State Legal Services Authority and the Registrar of Family Courts had previously received notice in the case from the High Court. Given that the petition concerned policy decisions, it later permitted the Law and Judiciary Department and the Women and Child Welfare Development Department to be added as parties.