Response to Letter from Hon Cyd Ho of 3 February 2001

1. We note none of the submissions attached to the letter ruled out the plausibility and feasibility of collaborative DNA parentage testing involving more than one laboratory. The submissions pointed out the importance of having common and established procedures and quality control measures, and emphasized the need for monitoring and close collaboration between the laboratories. These further submissions are not inconsistent with the view taken by the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) in their letter of 4 December 2000 that "collaborative DNA testing could be made technologically viable and sound", and that close collaboration between the laboratories concerned would be required.

2. Areas of concern regarding monitoring and collaboration have been identified and addressed by the Government and Mainland authorities in mapping out the prescribed genetic test procedure. Apart from formulating a set of comprehensive quality assurance measures, the two sides have also carried out simulation tests which provided first-hand experience and results confirming that the procedure is technologically sound and reliable. Details of the simulation tests were presented to the Bills Committee at its meeting on 28 November 2000.

3. On the specific issues raised in the submissions regarding accreditation, exchange of samples for testing, other monitoring and quality assurance measures, they have already been addressed fully in the Administration's written responses dated 21 November 2000, 28 November 2000, 13 December 2000 and 12 January 2001, and discussed at length at previous meetings of the Bills Committee. We just wish to highlight the following points –

   (a) Professor Walter Ho of the Chinese University of Hong Kong agrees with the AABB that collaborative testing can

be done reliably provided that “the laboratories (1) use exactly the same genetic systems, DNA technologies and reagents, (2) cross-train their technologists and (3) continually exchange specimens for proficiency testing”. As explained in our submission of 12 January 2001, these three requirements have been incorporated in the comprehensive set of quality assurance measures that will be implemented.

(b) The submission from National Association of Testing Authorities of Australia (NATA) states that “[i]n Australia, it would be possible to have the testing performed in two different laboratories but both would have to be NATA accredited for parentage testing”. Professor Walter Ho also mentioned the question of accreditation in his submission. In our case, Government Laboratory is accredited for forensic serology and DNA analysis which covers parentage testing. The designated laboratory in the Mainland will adopt the same technology and procedures as the Government Laboratory.

(c) In the memorandum issued by Immigration and Naturalization Service of the US Department of Justice attached to Dr Kenneth Lee’s submission, it is stated that Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism (RFLP) tests are being phased out by laboratories in the US and the recommended DNA test for parentage testing is the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. As set out in our submission of 12 January 2001, our prescribed genetic test procedure will adopt the PCR method.

Security Bureau
February 2001