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The Honourable Ms Miriam Lau, GBS, JP
Chairman of the House Committee
Legislative Council
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Proposed Priority in the Scrutiny of Bills by Members

I am writing to propose that priority be accorded by Members to the scrutiny of two Bills, in the following order –

1. Revenue (Personalized Vehicle Registration Marks) Bill 2005;
and
2. Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Bill

should the House Committee decide to set up Bills Committees to examine the Bills.

Revenue (Personalised Vehicle Registration Marks) Bill 2005

The Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council (LegCo) on 4 May 2005. It seeks to amend the Road Traffic Ordinance to give effect to the Personalised Vehicle Registration Marks (PVRMs) Scheme, a Budget initiative in the 2004-05 financial year. The proposal will generate revenue for the public coffers and provide more choices to vehicle owners. Early implementation of the Scheme will also help ensure the integrity and credibility of Budget initiatives.

The Transport Department plans to dovetail the invitation of applications under the PVRMs Scheme with the completion of its on-going upgrading work for the licensing computer system. Subject to passage of the Bill by LegCo, the earliest time when the Department may start to receive applications would be end-2005. Hence, we suggest that first priority be allocated to the Bill, so that the Bills Committee may commence scrutiny as soon as possible.

Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Bill

The Bill was introduced into LegCo on 4 May 2005. It seeks to amend the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance to confer additional powers on the Government to deal with the problem of mosquito breeding more effectively. In this regard, we request second priority for this Bill, in order that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department may implement in the summer of 2005 the measures proposed in the Bill. Our proposal has the support of the Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Panel.

Revenue bills constitute an integral part of the Budget and we appreciate that Members have been giving priority attention to them over the years. Other than the Revenue (Personalised Vehicle Registration Marks) Bill as mentioned above, Members may take note that the Revenue (Abolition of Estate Duty) Bill 2005 will be introduced shortly into LegCo on 11 May 2005. If the two Revenue bills were taken together, we propose that the Revenue (Abolition of Estate Duty) Bill 2005 should take a higher priority, subject to Members' decision to set up a Bills Committee to examine the Bill following its introduction.

The Revenue (Abolition of Estate Duty) Bill 2005 seeks to implement the proposal to abolish estate duty announced in the 2005-06 Budget. It will enhance Hong Kong's status as a major global asset management centre and enable us to capture the growing market in this region. At present, the assessment of estate duty takes time, and the assets of citizens, particularly that of operators of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), may be frozen during the assessment period. The proposed

abolition will also reduce the time taken for obtaining the grant of probate or letters of administration, thereby helping to ease cash flow problems that heirs to an estate may face, particularly for operators of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Since the Government has announced its intention to abolish the tax in the Budget, we are committed to putting it into effect as soon as possible.

I should be most grateful if you would put forward our proposals for Members' consideration at the coming House Committee meeting on 6 May 2005.

(Ms CHANG King-yiu)
Director of Administration