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14 April 2005

The Hon Henry TANG Ying-yen, GBS, JP
Financial Secretary
Financial Secretary's Private Office
12/F, West Wing
Central Government Offices
Lower Albert Road
Hong Kong

Dear Mr TANG,

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study the Streamlining of Food Business Licensing**

On behalf of the Subcommittee to Study the Streamlining of Food Business Licensing formed under the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, I write to convey to you the Subcommittee's views on ways to make the licensing system for food businesses more effective.

The Subcommittee has held meetings with the Administration, including representatives of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, Subgroup on Business Facilitation under the Economic and Employment Council (EEC), and the relevant departments responsible for examining and approving applications for food business licences, liquor licences and certificates of compliance for clubhouses.

The Subcommittee has noted that while measures had been taken in recent years to shorten the processing time for food business licences, it still takes about 164 and 106 working days respectively on average to process a restaurant and non-restaurant licence application.

To further shorten the processing time for such applications, Members are of the view that the Administration should consider setting up a unified licensing authority to provide one-stop service for all types of food business licences (including liquor licences). Members consider that the unified licensing

authority should comprise staff from Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Buildings Department and Fire Services Department and they should be accommodated under one roof to provide services to licence applicants. The arrangement will ensure that there will be a dedicated team of professional staff to examine the licence applications and the relevant certificates of compliance. It will also enhance the communication and efficiency of the relevant departments in processing these applications and subsequent requests for revisions to layout plans by applicants.

The Subcommittee also urges the Administration to adopt a third party certification system whereby the licensing authority can rely on the certification by authorised persons/professionals on compliance of the building safety, fire safety, ventilation and hygiene requirements in granting the food business licences. Under the proposed system, it will no longer be necessary for the licensing authority to conduct compliance checks and pay site visits to the premises before issuance of licence. The licensing authority can check compliance during regular or surprise inspections of the food premises, and the authorised persons or professionals concerned will be held responsible for any non-compliance.

The Subcommittee requests you to consider Members' views in taking forward the EEC's recommendations on streamlining food business licensing to better facilitate the trade. The Subcommittee hopes that you will give favourable consideration to the allocation of extra resources required for implementing the above proposals.

I should be grateful if your office would keep the Subcommittee informed of EEC's deliberations and the Administration's decision on the matter.

At the instruction of the Subcommittee, I also copy this letter to the relevant bureaux for their consideration of the policy aspects of the Subcommittee's proposals. The representatives of Health, Welfare and Food Bureau have undertaken to coordinate a response of the relevant bureaux involved in food business licensing, for consideration by the Subcommittee by May/June 2005.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs Constance LI)
Clerk to Subcommittee

c.c. Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Chairman)

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