

立法會
Legislative Council

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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Subcommittee on Review of the
Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme**

**Minutes of the 7th meeting
held on Friday, 22 July 2005 at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members absent : Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC

Members attending : Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC

Public Officers attending : All items
Ms Salina YAN
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security)

Mrs Brenda FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 2

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Miss Nancy LAW, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mr CHENG Chok-man
Atg. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Mr LAI Shiu-bor
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 2
Social Welfare Department

Mr IP Tin-sung
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 3
Social Welfare Department

Miss YEUNG Kok-wah
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 4
Social Welfare Department

Mr Kenneth NG
Senior Statistician (Social Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

Mr Byron NG
Senior Labour Officer (Employment Services Division)
Labour Department

**Deputations
by invitation** : Item IV

The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

Mr WONG Kwai-yau
Supervisor

Ms HO Yin
Social Worker

Oxfam Hong Kong

Mr Joseph WOO
Manager for Hong Kong Programme

Society for Community Organization

Ms SZE Lai-shan
Community Organizer

Concern Group on the Rights of New Immigrant Women

Ms YAU Yik-yung
Spokeswomen

Blindforce

Mr Silver KONG

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Mr Alfred CHOY
Member

Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor
Member

Christian Action

Ms Candy CHENG
Manager, Social Services Department

Ms Carol LEE
Centre-in-charge

Hong Kong Women's Coalition in Equal Opportunity

Miss CHUNG Yuen-yi
Project-in-charge

Association for the Advancement of Feminism

Ms CHOI Wing-sze
Organizer

Ms LUI Sze-pik
Member

Hong Kong Christian Institute

Miss HO Pui-wah

Ms Rose WU
Director

Grassroot Women Poverty Concern Group

Ms CHAN Wai-fong
Representative

Ms LI Hiu-yin
Representative

爭取基層生活保障組

Ms WONG Sau-ping
Representative

Miss KWAN Ka-lee
Social Worker

Single Mothers Concern Group

Ms HO Foei-lin
Deputy Chairman

Ms CHU Yau
Member

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Mariana CHAN
Chief Officer, Policy Research and Advocacy

New Women Arrivals League

Ms KO Ka-hung
Deputy Chairman

Ms PAT Pui-ming
Executive

Hong Kong Social Workers Association

Ms LAW Suk-kwan
Board of Director

Harmony House

Ms Queenie YUEN
Co-ordinator

Ms Jesscia LAM
Social Worker

Civil Human Rights Front

Ms YIP Po-lam
Vice-Convenor

Ms Baig Raees Begum
Vice-Convenor of Human Rights Commission Task Force

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse
(Kwan Fook)

Ms Ada
Member

Ms LUI Lok-man
Staff

Clerk in attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 8

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Confirmation of minutes
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2321/04-05)

The minutes of meeting held on 23 June 2005 were confirmed.

II. Annual adjustment of the standard payment rates under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2310/04-05(01))

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) (DSHWF (ES&SS)) briefed members on the latest position of the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP) and the annual adjustment timetable for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and Social Security Allowance (SSA) standard payment rates.

3. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he did not object to adopt, from 2005-06, the proposal of making the annual adjustment to the standard payment rates of CSSA and SSA automatic on the basis of a fixed cycle taking into account the SSAIP movement for the past 12 months ending in October and to effect the new rates in February of the following year. Mr LEE however opposed the Administration's proposal to seek delegated authority from the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) for approval of the new rates to be exercised by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) in consultation with the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury. Mr LEE pointed out that the proposal of delegating the authority from FC to SHWF to adjust the standard payment rates of CSSA and SSA, albeit in accordance with established mechanism for routine periodic review, could only work if there was mutual respect and trust between the executive branch and the legislature. Past experience however revealed that this was not the case. The facts that the Administration sought to effect the reduction of the monthly standard rate for households comprising three and more than three able-bodied adults/children by 10% and 20% respectively via the 1999 Appropriation Bill and the downward adjustment of the monthly standard rates of CSSA and the Disability Allowance (DA) under the SSA Scheme by 11.1% in

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2003 via the 2003 and 2004 Appropriation Bills respectively, instead of effecting such through FC, were cases in point.

4. The Chairman shared Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's view. He pointed out that tying the downward adjustment of CSSA and SSA rates in with the Appropriation Bills had put Members in a very difficult position. If Members opposed the downward adjustment of CSSA and SSA rates, they could only do so by voting against the Appropriation Bill. If the Appropriation Bill was not passed by the Council, the Administration would be left without any financial provision to carry on its work in the coming year. As the Administration could always circumvent FC to effect changes to the financial provisions for the CSSA and SSA Schemes via the Appropriation Bill or other means, the Chairman said that LegCo should not lightly give away its power to control public expenditure by delegating the approval of new CSSA and SSA rates to the executive branch.

5. DSHWF(ES&SS) responded that under the delegated authority, SHWF could only adjust the CSSA and SSA rates in accordance with the established mechanism relating to SSAIP changes described in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Administration's paper. Any changes outside the aforesaid scope to the CSSA and SSA Schemes would need approval from FC. DSHWF(ES&SS) further said that delegated authority from FC to the executive branch was not new. For instance, FC had delegated its authority to the Secretary for Education and Manpower to grant education subsidy to students. DSHWF(ES&SS) pointed out that the reduction of the monthly standard rate for households comprising three and more than three able-bodied adults/children by 10% and 20% respectively was not made based on the SSAIP movement, and was in fact made in response to the growing public concern that the levels of CSSA benefit for larger families was high as compared with market wages. The reduction was one of the recommendations of the 1998 review of the CSSA Scheme which underwent wide public consultation and was effected via the 1999 Appropriation Bill with wider scrutiny by FC.

6. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that he had no strong view about making the annual adjustment to the standard payment rates of CSSA and SSA automatic on the basis of a fixed cycle taking into account the inflation/deflation reflected by the SSAIP. Mr TAM further said that if this new arrangement was implemented, there should be no need for the Administration to effect the rate adjustment through the Appropriation Bill in future. Mr TAM then asked whether consideration could be given to freezing the CSSA and SSA rates at the current levels after one year should the SSAIP movement for the past 12 months registered a very minimal change, and making up the changes registered in the SSAIP movement for the past 12 months to the next annual adjustment cycle. DSHWF (ES&SS) responded that this could be considered, having regard to the administrative work on the part of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to make

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the necessary adjustment to its computer system to ensure correct payment to over 650 000 recipients (including 540 000 CSSA recipients and 110 000 DA recipients).

7. The Chairman expressed worry that the adoption of an adjustment mechanism based on actual movements of the SSAIP would put CSSA and SSA recipients in a vulnerable position at times of high inflation. The Chairman asked whether consideration could be given to using the forecast method of adjusting CSSA and SSA rates, in view of the increasingly clear sign that Hong Kong was entering an inflationary stage.

8. DSHWF (ES&SS) responded that the forecast method of adjusting CSSA and SSA rates had been previously used by the Administration. In view of repeated discrepancies between the forecast SSAIP and the actual SSAIP movements noted from 1989-90 onwards, the forecast method of adjusting CSSA and SSA rates was replaced by an adjustment based on the actual price movements of the SSAIP in the previous year in 1999 which had the benefit of providing certainty and ensuring objectivity in the adjustment. DSHWF (ES&SS) further said that the discrepancies between the forecast SSAIP and the actual SSAIP movements were also pointed out by the Director of Audit when he carried out an audit investigation on the administration of the CSSA and SSA Schemes from late 1998 to early 1999 when he noted that the combination of over-estimation of the SSAIP and deviations from the stated annual inflationary adjustment mechanism in the past years had a significant impact on government expenditure. DSHWF (ES&SS) also said that another reason for aborting the forecast method was because if there was a significant over-estimation of the SSAIP, CSSA and SSA recipients generally found it difficult to get used to a significant downward adjustment of rates to make up for the over-adjustment in the beginning.

9. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) supplemented that it was very difficult to determine which inflationary/deflationary forecasts would be the most reliable. Furthermore, the resultant deflationary adjustment made in 2003 was a testament that the forecast method was problematic in that it gave a wrong impression of reducing the standard rates when in fact it was an act to make up for over-adjustment of the CSSA and DA rates in the past years due to over-estimation of the SSAIP.

10. The Chairman concluded that there was no objection to making the annual adjustment of CSSA and SSA rates automatic on the basis of a fixed cycle and taking into account the inflation/deflation reflected by the SSAIP. The concern over the proposal to seek delegated authority from FC for approval to adjust the CSSA and SSA rates to be exercised by SHWF however remained, as adjusting the CSSA and SSA rates might not always base on the established mechanism and could due to other considerations. The Chairman pointed out that if the

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established mechanism was the only basis for making adjustment, the Administration should have already adjusted the Old Age Allowance (OAA) under the SSA Scheme downwards instead of making no change to the OAA rate until the 11.5% over-adjustment had been fully offset by inflation. The Chairman further said that while he noted the problems highlighted by the Administration on the use of the forecast method to adjust the CSSA and SSA rates, he was of the view that the Administration should not rule out the adoption of the forecast method in times of high inflation. DSHWF (ES&SS) thanked members for their support for the automatic adjustment mechanism and noted the Chairman's views. DSHWF (ES&SS) further said that if recent movements in the SSAIP and other economic indicators pointed to likely high inflation, consideration could be given to seeking approval for any inflationary adjustments to the standard payment rates ahead of the annual cycle.

III. Revised proposals for single parent recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2310/04-05(02) and CB(2)2341/04-05(01) to (03))

11. Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, (Elderly Services and Social Security)² briefed members on the revised package of proposals for empowering CSSA single parents to achieve self-reliance and social integration in light of comments received as detailed in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)2310/04-05(02)). The main features of the revised proposals were as follows -

- (a) single parents and other child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged 12 to 14, instead of 6 to 14 as originally proposed, would be required to seek at least part-time employment (defined as a paid job entailing not less than 32 hours a month);
- (b) the proposal to pay the single parent supplement (SPS) only to single parent recipients earning at least \$1,430 a month and with at least one child aged below 15 would be held in abeyance, pending the review on the implementation of the new arrangements;
- (c) a package of arrangements consisting of a mandatory employment assistance programme specifically for single parents and child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14, and intensive employment assistance and basic skills and skills upgrading training in the form of Intensive Employment Assistance Projects for those single parents and child carers with no or limited work experience would be launched by SWD; and

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- (d) sanction for single parents and child carers who failed to meet their obligations under the mandatory employment assistance programme or intensive employment assistance and basic skills and skills upgrading training by deducting \$200 from their CSSA payment would be introduced by SWD.

Subject to funds being available and to allow time for single parents and family careers to adjust, the Administration intended to implement the revised proposals from April 2006.

Views of deputations

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

12. Mr Alfred CHOI and Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor presented the views of the Alliance as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2341/04-05(01)) with the aid of powerpoint. They pointed out that although the revised proposals had relaxed the requirements for single parent recipients to seek employment, the Administration still had not addressed the problem of the lack of part-time and low-skilled jobs in the market for taking up by single parent recipients. A recent study conducted by the Alliance revealed that of the over 2 000 non-skilled jobs advertised by the Labour Department, only about 591 were part-time jobs. Of these 591 part-time jobs, only 94 jobs were suitable for single parent recipients as the working hours of these jobs were generally from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm during weekdays. The study further revealed that the hourly wages of low-skilled jobs were still very low ranging from \$24.50 to \$37.40 depending on the educational attainment required. Although some jobs indicated no particular educational attainment, the employers often required the applicants to have at least two years' working experience, could speak some Putonghua and English and/or had attended some training courses etc.

13. In view of the aforesaid labour conditions and having regard to the fact that children under the age of 15 still required close parental care, particularly if they lived in single parent families, the Alliance urged the Administration not to make it mandatory for single parent recipients with the youngest child under the age of 15 to seek employment. The Alliance further urged that the following measures be implemented -

- (a) a case manager approach should be adopted in helping single parent recipients to move towards self-reliance, having regard to the special needs of these recipients;
- (b) SWD should ensure that there were adequate suitable part-time jobs in the market for single parent recipients, who were mostly of low

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educational attainment, before requiring them to seek employment;

- (c) the Administration should expeditiously enact legislation on minimum wage and maximum working hours so as to ensure that every employee could be remunerated in a fair and reasonable manner; and
- (d) SWD should drop all sanctioning measures, including deducting \$200 from the CSSA payable to those single parents or family carers who failed to meet their obligations under the employment assistance programmes.

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

14. Mr WONG Kwai-yan presented the views of the Association as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(01)). The major views of the Association were as follows -

- (a) helping single parents on CSSA to take up employment was not the only way in moving them towards self-reliance. Other means, such as participating in voluntary work and attending education programmes, should be included;
- (b) before requiring single parent recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment, SWD should ensure that there were enough jobs in the market for this type of workers. These jobs should be reasonably paid and could provide room for development to better encourage them to attain self-reliance. At the same time, the Administration should ensure that there were adequate supportive services, such as after school care services and child care services, to assist single parents who worked,
- (c) in view of the varying needs of single parent families and that single parents were at different stages of readiness to work, consideration should be given to assigning a social worker to draw up a tailor-made assistance programme for each single parent family on CSSA. Such an approach was considered more effective than merely using the age of children as the benchmark for determining which segment of single parent recipients should seek employment in order to move towards self-reliance;
- (d) the long term goal of helping single parent recipients to move towards self-reliance should be to lift them from poverty. The existing social security policies should be reviewed to ensure the

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realisation of such long term goal; and

- (e) in requiring single parent recipients to seek employment, a study should be conducted to find out its impact on children so that appropriate measures, where necessary, could be formulated and implemented to safeguard the interests of children.

Oxfam Hong Kong

15. Mr Joseph WOO said that despite the improvements made to the proposals for empowering CSSA single parents to achieve self-reliance and social integration, Oxfam still could not support the revised proposals for the following reasons -

- (a) requiring single parent recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment would drive the wages of low-skilled jobs even lower, thereby creating more working poverty;
- (b) the jobs to be secured by single parent recipients were mostly likely to be menial ones which did not offer any room to improve their employability. Moreover, the income would not allow the job holders to support themselves; and
- (c) the existing supportive services to assist needy single parents were still far from adequate.

Society for Community Organisation (SOCO)

16. Ms SZE Lai-shan presented the views of SOCO as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(02)). In particular, SOCO was of the view that without adequate support services in place to assist needy single parents, requiring single parent recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment would only create more family problems, the result of which would undermine the interests and welfare of both children and their parents who were usually women. SOCO suggested the following -

- (a) SWD should clearly define what acts would constitute failure to meet obligations under the mandatory employment assistance programme for single parent recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14, in order to avoid these single parents from sacrificing the interests of the children as a result of taking up employment so that SWD would not deduct \$200 from their monthly CSSA payments;

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- (b) SWD should reform the existing after school care and child care services in terms of service hours, age groups of target children, fee etc, so as to better meet the special needs of single parents. Consideration should also be given to financing the personal childcare service run by outside organisations so as to increase the flexibility of the existing after school care and child care services; and
- (c) taking up employment should not be considered as the only way to help single parent recipients achieve social integration. If these recipients could not find jobs working for eight hours a week, participation in voluntary/community work and attending training and educational programmes should be recognised by SWD as alternatives to taking up employment.

Concern Group on the Rights of New Immigrant Women

17. Ms YAU Yik-yung told the meeting that many single parents in her position were willing to take up employment to attain self-alliance, but first they must be assured that their children would be well taken care of while they were away at work.

Single Mothers Concern Group

18. Ms CHU Yau presented the views of the Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(06)). Notably, the Concern Group strongly opposed the proposal of requiring single parent recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment for the reason that children aged between 12 to 14 were at a critical developmental stage requiring close supervision and care from their parents. Moreover, it was questionable whether there were adequate jobs in the market to suit the special requirements of single parent recipients. The Concern Group hoped that the Administration would recognise that taking care of children at home was also a contribution to the community, albeit not tangible. The Administration should allocate more resources in providing job training programmes to single parent recipients with the youngest child below 15 so that they could get prepared for work after their children had grown older.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)

19. Ms Mariana CHAN presented the views of HKCSS as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(07)). In particular, HKCSS urged that a personal adviser be assigned to identify the assistance and support which individual single parent recipient with the youngest child between 12 to 14 needed

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to achieve self-reliance. Such a case management service should best be contracted out to non-governmental organisations which had ample experience in providing employment assistance to the vulnerable groups in the community. Other suggestions made by HKCSS were as follows -

- (a) endeavours which could enhance one's social capital, such as participating in voluntary/community work and attending job training programmes, should be recognised as work under the proposals to help single parent recipients attain self-reliance;
- (b) to make the proposals to help single parent recipients move towards self-reliance work, more measures should be taken by the Administration outside the social security system. These included increasing the number of jobs suitable for this group of people, establishing statutory minimum wage and maximum working hours and encouraging employers to adopt a family-friendly attitude towards their employees such as allowing single parent employers to work flexible hours;
- (c) SWD should not, in the absence of a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of SPS, cease to grant the supplement to single parents in recognition of the special difficulties which they faced in bringing up families on their own without the support of spouses. In addition, consideration should be given to providing incentives to single parent recipients seeking employment;
- (d) recent review of the arrangements for single parent recipients under the CSSA Scheme lacked transparency. The Administration should expeditiously seek the views of all stakeholders on the matter before deciding on the way forward; and
- (e) there was a need for the Administration to conduct a comprehensive review of the whole CSSA system for the purpose of helping all able-bodied recipients out of poverty.

New Women Arrivals League

20. Ms KO Ka-hung introduced the League's submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2341/04-05(03)) which opposed the revised proposals for single parent recipients for the reason that it was unreasonable to require single parents with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment. Such a move, if adopted, would only save money but at the expense of creating more inter-generational poverty. The League hoped that the Administration would adopt a caring and fair attitude in helping needy single parent families by, say,

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encouraging single parents who were ready to work to participate in voluntary work to build up self-confidence and achieve social integration and ensuring that there were suitable types of jobs in the market for single parent recipients before forcing them to seek employment.

Hong Kong Social Workers Association (HKSWA)

21. Ms LAW Suk-kwan presented the views of HKSWA as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(08)). HKSWA was particularly concerned that the mandatory employment assistance programme for single parents on CSSA with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 only focused on the narrow aspect of helping single parents to obtain employment. In HKSWA's view, the programme should be broadened to help single parents out of poverty and the target should not only be on the single parent but on the whole family. HKSWA also questioned whether SWD's Job Developers had the requisite skills and experience to ultimately lift the single parents out of poverty which should be the goal of helping single parents to move towards self-reliance.

Harmony House

22. Ms Jessica LAM presented the views of Harmony House as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(09)). Notably, Harmony House welcomed the Administration's proposal to change the requirement for single parent recipients to seek employment from with the youngest child below 15 to between 12 to 14 and put in abeyance the proposal to pay the SPS only to single parent recipients earning at least \$1,430 a month and with at least one child aged below 15. However, Harmony House hoped that the Administration would give due consideration to the following suggestions -

- (a) extending the service hours of after school care and child care centres and increasing the number of fee-waiving after school care places;
- (b) a step-by-step approach should be used to help single parent recipients to attain self-reliance, say, by first engaging them in voluntary work and/or attending job skill training courses;
- (c) the Administration should encourage the business sector to adopt a family-friendly attitude towards employees;
- (d) consideration should be given to providing funding or loan for the setting up of co-operatives to promote the social and economic participation of single parents; and

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- (e) SWD should exercise discretion in not deducting \$200 from the CSSA payment of those single parents who could not meet the obligations to the mandatory employment assistance programme with good reason(s).

Civil Human Rights Front

23. Ms Baig Raees Begum presented the views of the Front as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(10)). As relying on social security for survival was a basic human right and as the revised proposals would still affect close to 20 000 single parent families, the Front urged the Administration to conduct public consultation on the proposals before coming to a decision. The Front also urged the Administration to formulate long term strategies and goals of the CSSA system and conduct wide public consultation on them so as to come up with a social security policy which could meet human right requirements.

Kwan Fook

24. Ms Ada told the meeting of her plight as a single parent, and urged the Administration not to force single parent recipients to seek employment for the reasons given in Kwan Fook's submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(11)) which were similar to those expressed by other deputations earlier at the meeting.

Association for the Advancement of Feminism

25. Ms CHOI Wing-sze presented the views of the Association as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(05)). Specifically, the Association was disappointed that the Administration still intended to force single parent recipients with at least one child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment which was a total disregard to their special needs and varying circumstances. The Association urged the Administration to take the following course of actions -

- (a) voluntary, instead of mandatory, employment assistance programme should be provided to single parents and no sanction should be imposed on those who failed to meet obligations to the programme;
- (b) a maintenance board should be set up to help divorced women to collect outstanding maintenance fee from their former spouses;
- (c) adequate and comprehensive after school care and child care services should be provided, including extending service hours and increasing places;
- (d) all government policies should ensure that no particular gender was

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put in a disadvantaged position and that taking care of family members at home should be recognised as a valuable contribution to the community; and

- (e) legislation should be enacted to ensure the eradication of all forms of discrimination in workplaces.

Hong Kong Christian Institute

26. Miss HO Pui-wah and Ms Rose WU presented the views of the Institute as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2341/04-05(02)). In particular, the Institute called upon the Administration to take the following steps -

- (a) immediately abort the planned implementation of the revised proposals for single parent recipients from April 2006. In the meantime, conduct extensive public consultation on ways to assist single parents on CSSA to achieve self-reliance and social integration;
- (b) conduct a comprehensive review of the labour market to find out what types of jobs were suitable for single parents with young children and the availability of these jobs, so as to develop more effective job training programmes for single parent recipients; and
- (c) adequate resources should be allocated for the provision of child care and youth services, so as to allow single parents to have some free time take part in activities aiming at helping them to achieve social integration and enhancing their social capital.

Grassroot Women Poverty Concern Group

27. Ms CHAN Wai-fong and Ms LI Hiu-yin urged the Administration to abort the revised proposals for single parent recipients as it conveyed a wrong message to the public that single parents on CSSA were lazy people and had to be forced to seek employment which was not true. Single parent recipients were willing to seek employment if there were adequate after school care services for their children. However, not only were the existing after school care centres inadequate, these centres also did not cover children above 11 years old. It was also questionable whether the \$75 million school-based after-school learning and support programme would help to relieve single parents to work as the money would not necessarily be targetted on children of single parent recipients.

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爭取基層生活保障組

28. Ms WONG Sau-ping and Miss Kwan Ka-lee opposed the revised proposals for single parent recipients, the reasons of which were similar to those expressed by other deputations earlier at the meeting. They urged the Administration to comply with the requests made by the Chairman at the previous meeting of the Subcommittee held on 24 May 2005 that the Administration should only come back to the Subcommittee when it had more details on the support services to help single parents, such as the after school care programme service and employment assistance, figures to support that it was possible for CSSA single parents to find part-time employment and how it intended to take forward the scheme in selected districts, and after consulting the views of CSSA single parents and the public at large.

Blindforce

29. Mr Silver KONG said that single parents should not be singled out to camouflage the flaw of the existing social security policy in its lack of strategies and measures to lift able-bodied recipients from poverty. Mr KONG further said that not only were the revised proposals discriminatory, they also violated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which required every State party to ensure that the basic needs of children aged below 18 were met.

Christian Action

30. Ms Candy CHENG hoped that more employment assistance programme could also be provided to single parent recipients with the youngest child aged below 12, so that they could get prepared for work when their children were older. Ms Carol LEE told the meeting of their experience in helping single parent recipients to seek employment.

Hong Kong Women's Coalition in Equal Opportunity

31. Miss CHUNG Yuen-yi highlighted the views of the Coalition which opposed the revised proposals, details of which were set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2373/04-05(04)). In particular, the Coalition pointed out that the revised proposals for single parent recipients were discriminatory against women given that the great majority of single parents on CSSA were women. The Coalition deplored that despite the support given by LegCo for the setting up of a maintenance board on two occasions in the past, the Administration still refused to implement it. As a result, women who failed to receive maintenance fee from their former spouses were forced to rely on public assistance as a last resort for taking care of their young children.

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Discussion

32. Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Mr Ronny TONG and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan shared deputations' views, and urged the Administration to withdraw the revised proposals for single parent recipients.

33. DSW said that the revised proposal had taken into account comments on the earlier paper. There would be assistance for single parents and child carers in finding part-time jobs and basic training would be provided. Moreover, as long as single parents and child carers had made every effort to seek jobs, the \$200 would not be deducted. He added that planning would continue for the Scheme to be implemented in April 2006.

Conclusion

34. Due to time constraint, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to next meet in October 2005 to continue discussion on the revised proposals for single parent recipients under the CSSA Scheme in the light of comments received. The Secretariat would fix the date of the next meeting after consulting members and the Administration.

35. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:38 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 August 2005