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Urgent by fax (2840 0467)

5 July 2006

Dr York CHOW Yat-ngok, SBS, JP
Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
8/F, West Wing
Central Government Offices
11 Ice House Street
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Dr CHOW,

Panel on Welfare Services

Services and support to victims of sexual violence

The Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel) discussed at its meetings on 14 November and 15 December 2005 the services and support to victims of sexual violence. Members shared the view that RainLily, which had been providing comprehensive, one-stop and timely service to the victims of sexual violence, was worthy of financial support, and strongly requested the Administration to provide subvention to RainLily, upon the expiry of its funding support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

The Panel passed two motions at the meetings urging the Administration to immediately fund RainLily so as to enable it to continue its services until the Administration's review of the existing services to victims of sexual violence was completed. Despite the two motions passed, the Administration paid no heed to the Panel's requests. Meanwhile, RainLily was able to obtain alternative funding from the Community Chest which would last until March 2007.

At a special meeting on 3 July 2006, the Administration informed the Panel that it had come up with a new service model after critically reviewing the existing services. With support from the Lotteries Fund, a non-governmental organization (NGO) would be selected through open bidding to operate a new Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (the Centre) in the New Territories West. The Administration has also decided not to provide recurrent funding to RainLily.

Members noted that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had already issued a letter on 23 June 2006 to NGOs operating welfare services to invite them to express general interest to operate the Centre and to attend a briefing session scheduled for 6 July 2006. Members expressed great dissatisfaction that there was no consultation with the Panel on the new service model.

The Panel passed a motion at the meeting expressing dissatisfaction and regret that the open bidding procedures for operating the Centre had already commenced before there was any consultation with the Panel and relevant stakeholders and urging the Administration to consult the Panel and stakeholders before deciding the best model of service delivery to the victims of sexual violence.

On behalf of the Panel, I am writing to convey -

- (a) members' dissatisfaction with the Administration's complete disregard of the motions passed by the Panel at its meetings on 14 November and 15 December 2005; and
- (b) members' request that SWD should suspend the open bidding procedures for operating the Centre, and consult the Panel and relevant stakeholders on the best model of service delivery before launching the new service for the victims of sexual violence.

I look forward to your early response to the Panel's requests.

Yours sincerely,

(Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung)
Chairman
Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

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17 July 2006

Dr. Hon. Fernando Cheung Chiu-hung
Chairman
Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Dr Hon Fernando Cheung,

Panel on Welfare Services
Services and support to victims of sexual violence

Thank you for your letter dated 5 July 2006 on the captioned subject.

In response to the two motions passed by the Panel on Welfare Services in last November and December, the Administration has initiated a review on the services for victims of sexual violence, with a view to further strengthening the services and support for such victims.

With respect to Members' concern on the funding of Rainlily, we

have already stated our position clearly in our previous submissions to the Panel. We would like to stress that not all social services are funded by the Government. A good number of worthy projects are being provided through other funding sources. The Rainlily was previously supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and is now on funding support from the Community Chest. The Administration shall continue to encourage different sectors to participate in social services through different means, including seeking funding support from non-Government sectors.

Furthermore, it is generally necessary for the Administration to go through the process of open bidding and to consider different service proposals before awarding a service contract to a particular service agency. This ensures a level playing field as well as proper service standard and output. It is hence not possible, nor appropriate, for the Administration to make any commitment to provide funding to a particular agency.

The Panel has expressed dissatisfaction that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had already written to NGOs operating welfare services on 23 June 2006 to invite them to express general interest to operate the proposed multi-purpose crisis intervention and support centre and to attend a briefing session scheduled for 6 July 2006. As you have rightly pointed out in your letter, the invitation letter to the NGOs was an invitation for expression of interest and it is not an invitation for the tendering of the new service. The briefing session held on 6 July 2006 was intended to brief interested NGOs of the broad concepts of the proposed centre and SWD would also hope to take the opportunity to receive feedbacks and comments by the NGO sector, based on which a detailed service specification will be formulated. The formal tendering procedure is expected to commence in August 2006.

I hope the above helps to clarify the Administration's position on the matter. We believe it should be the paramount concern of the Administration and the Legislative Council, as well as the society, to involve different sectors to provide coordinated and accessible services and support to meet the needs of the victims of sexual violence and not just funding for one service provider. The new service model proposed is also

in line with our policy objective to provide one-stop services to persons in need through an integrated approach, which helps to avoid stigmatization of certain service users and create synergy between different services, resulting in the more effective use of resources.

Yours sincerely,

(Hinny Lam)
for Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food

c.c. Director of Social Welfare