

政制及內地事務局局長
政府總部



SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS
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27 February 2008

The Honourable Margaret Ng
Chairman
Legislative Council Bills Committee
on the Race Discrimination Bill
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Chairman,

**Support measures for ethnic minorities and new arrivals
and proposed amendments to Race Discrimination Bill**

Further to our meeting on 28 January 2008, I would like to keep you and Members of the Bills Committee informed of a number of initiatives to enhance support services for ethnic minorities and new arrivals from the Mainland and progress on proposed amendments to the Race Discrimination Bill.

Support measures for ethnic minorities

In regard to support services for ethnic minorities, we are committed to fostering their integration into the community and to facilitating their access to public services. I trust you and Members will be pleased to learn from the Financial Secretary's Budget Speech in the Legislative Council today that Government will enhance existing measures and introduce new initiatives, in addition to the extensive range of support services we have been providing over the years.

Specifically, we will establish four regional support service centres for ethnic minorities. These centres will provide the interpretation services needed by ethnic minorities in using medical and other public services, such as government job centres and social welfare offices. They will also operate Chinese and English language training courses and organise other activities such as community integration programmes for them. We will reserve \$16 million as the operating expenses for these four centres for the coming year and \$8 million to finance their setting up costs.

Moreover, to enhance support for the learning and teaching of non-Chinese speaking students, notably ethnic minority students, the Government will, with effect from the 2008/09 school year, offer on a recurrent basis the existing top-up cash grant for designated primary and secondary schools to put in place school-based support measures. We will suitably enhance the current rate of the grant (at \$300,000 a year) for individual designated schools with a larger intake of non-Chinese speaking students and will also endeavour to increase the number of designated schools from the current 19 to 25 over a period of two school years. The implementation of these measures is expected to incur an extra provision of \$13 million each year.

Support services for new arrivals from the Mainland

In regard to support services for new arrivals from the Mainland, we re-affirm our continued commitment to providing appropriate support services to facilitate their integration. In this connection, the Family Council will explore new initiatives and examine ways to strengthen existing measures.

Proposed amendments to the Bill

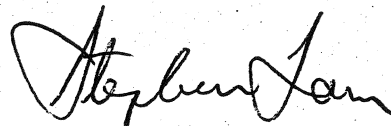
After careful deliberation taking into account the views expressed by Members, we will amend Clause 3 of the Bill to clarify that, when enacted, the Ordinance will bind the Government.

We also appreciate the concerns raised by Members over the alternative tests in Clause 4(2)(a) and (b) for determining whether or not a requirement or condition is justifiable. To address these concerns, we are working on a proposed amendment to straighten out the provision while keeping it in line with internationally accepted principles of rationality and proportionality.

We will inform the Bills Committee of the proposed wording once the draft Committee Stage Amendments are ready.

The above measures should clearly demonstrate the Government's commitment to the well being of our community and our willingness to listen to Members' views. I look forward to the opportunity for our further exchange of views at the coming meeting of the Bills Committee on 12 March.

Yours sincerely,



(Stephen Lam)

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs