



香港盲人輔導會
The Hong Kong Society for the Blind

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24 September 2009

Patron:
The Chief Executive
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The Honourable Donald Tsang, GBM

Vice Patrons:

Mrs. Marjorie Bray
Dr. Bessie Chiang
Mr. Stephen Fisher, JP
Mrs. Helen Kwok
Professor Dennis S.C. Lam
Professor C.K. Poon, GBS, JP

Chairman:

Mrs. Rachel Cartland

Chief Executive:

Ms. Maureen C.Y. Tam

At Headquarters:

Central Administration

Career Support & Development Centre

Centralised Braille Production Centre

Deafblind Resource Centre

General Eye & Low Vision Centre
(Direct Line: 2778 1772)

Information Accessibility Centre

Kowloon Home for the Aged Blind

Morning Glory Day Activity Centre
cum Hostel

Rehabilitation Centre

S.K. Yee Health Massage & Treatment Centre
Beauty Massage Centre
(Direct Line: 2779 1888)

Vision 2020 Low Vision Resource Centre

At Other Locations:

Bernard Van Zuden
Health Massage & Treatment Centre
(Tuen Mun Branch)

Jockey Club Tuen Mun Home for the Aged Blind
LG/F, 8 Tsing Fuk Lane, Tuen Mun, N.T.
Tel: 2469 9323 Fax: 2469 9857

Bradbury Care & Attention Home
for the Aged Blind

19 Mok Cheong Street, To Kwa Wan, Kowloon
Tel: 2333 3782, 2362 9125 Fax: 2330 9401

Factory for the Blind

19 Mok Cheong Street, To Kwa Wan, Kowloon
Tel: 2362 0451, 2333 0265 Fax: 2764 4904

General Eye & Low Vision Clinic
(Yuen Long Branch)

Yuen Long Home for the Aged Blind
G/F, 155-175 On Ning Road, Yuen Long, N.T.
Tel: 2470 1818 Fax: 2470 1006

The Hong Kong Jockey Club
Community Project Grant -
Parents Resource Centre
for Visually Impaired Children

Rm M1, Mezzanine Floor, Maintown Plaza,
223-227 Nam Cheong Street,
Shamshuiipo, Kowloon
Tel: 2994 9655 Fax: 2994 9648

Jockey Club

Tuen Mun Home for the Aged Blind
8 Tsing Fuk Lane, Tuen Mun, N.T.
Tel: 2468 8222 Fax: 2464 5895

Rehabilitation Centre (NT)

119-122, G/F, Tip Ying House,
Butterfly Estate, Tuen Mun, N.T.
Tel: 2466 3031 Fax: 2466 1007

Yuen Long Home for the Aged Blind
155-175 On Ning Road, Yuen Long, N.T.
Tel: 2476 0114 Fax: 2477 6119

Mr Tam Yiu Chung
Chairman to Bills Committee
Legislative Council Secretariat
3/F, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Mr Tam,

Re: Impact of the Minimum Wage Bill on the Factory for the Blind

The Hong Kong Society for the Blind is extremely concerned that the "Minimum Wage Bill", if enacted as it stands at present, will have a major negative impact on the survival of the Factory for the Blind. Therefore, we would like to submit the attached paper explaining the dilemma we would be facing.

We sincerely hope that the Bills Committee would consider adding: a) a "Grandfather" provision exempting People with Disabilities already employed; or b) exemption of the Factory and similar operations from the operation of the Bill to ensure the survival of the Factory and many similar NGO operations faced with similar difficulty.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Cartland (Mrs)

Chairman



Impact of the Minimum Wage Bill on the Factory for the Blind

1. The Factory for the Blind

The Factory for the Blind (“Factory”) was established by the Hong Kong Society for the Blind (“HKSB”) in 1963 to provide gainful employment for visually impaired persons and trainees with other disabilities who are unable to compete in the open market.

The Factory now employs in its two sections 212 persons according to their disabilities:

<i>Type of Disability</i>	<i>Production Section</i>	<i>Sheltered Workshop Section</i>
Mild grade mentally handicapped	43	
Visually impaired	16	
Visually impaired and mildly mental handicapped		13
Totally blind	2	
Moderate grade mentally handicapped	8	39
Ex-mentally ill	4	72
Various disabilities	14	1
Total:	87	125

2. The Trainees in the Sheltered Workshop Section

The objective of the sheltered workshop section is to provide vocational rehabilitation service to persons with mental and/or physical disabilities in a working environment in which they can be trained to engage in income-generating work (assembling and packaging), learn to adjust to normal work requirements, develop social skills and relationships and prepare for potential advancement to supported/open employment where possible. Presently, the trainees are paid on average \$700 to \$900 per month under the incentive payment scheme subvented by the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”).

3. The Workers in the Production Section

The Factory also runs a production-oriented section, providing appropriate employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including the visually impaired, in sewing, paper-box and filing tag making. Their average monthly earnings are \$3,000 per month.

4. The Impact of the Minimum Wage Bill

The Minimum Wage Bill (“Bill”), if enacted as it stands at present, will have a negative major impact on the workers in the Production Section. According to the Bill, People with Disabilities (“PWD”) should be treated no differently from their able-bodied counterparts and should thus be paid the statutory minimum wage unless they choose to invoke a special mechanism to assess their own productivity, in which event, the PWD may receive a discounted statutory minimum wage if their productivity is assessed to be lower than their able-bodied counterparts.

The Factory is currently receiving annually \$8.3 million (“Subvented Amount”) from the SWD under the Lump Sum Grant Subvention to cover the personal emoluments of 34 staff members, general administration cost, building maintenance and programme expense of the Factory. The annual sales income of the Factory together with the Subvented Amount is barely sufficient to cover the normal operating costs of the Factory.

We have diligently examined the possibilities for making the Factory more profitable but have come to the conclusion that there is no scope to achieve significant improvements. The Factory offers major benefits to the PWDs who work there as it gives meaning and purpose to their lives as well as opportunities for socialization. The pace of work can be reasonably relaxed so as to facilitate e.g. those PWDs who need to take regular medication or attend frequent medical appointments. The nature of the work is within the capabilities of our disabled workers. The total effect of this, however, is that the Factory cannot achieve the levels of profitability that a normal Factory in the private sector could.

If the Bill is enacted as it stands, the Factory will incur significant losses due to the large increase in the overheads of the Production Section. In all likelihood, the Factory will have to shut down unless the SWD may be persuaded to increase substantially the Subvented Amount so as to enable the Factory to survive the adverse impact caused by the enacted Bill.

While it fully supports the Bill, HKSB urges the Bills Committee to understand our situation and to consider adding some suitable provision in the Bill such as one of the following to ensure the survival of the Factory and many similar operations by other NGOs faced with similar difficulty:

1. A “Grandfather” provision exempting PWDs already employed; or
2. Exemption of the Factory and similar operations from the operation of the Bill.

In the meantime, HKSB will formally write to the SWD to alert them to the possibility that the Factory is threatened with extinction.

Hong Kong Society for the Blind

24 September 2009