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GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT
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L/M to SBCR 2/6/2831/94

本函檔號 OUR REF:

來函檔號 YOUR REF:

電話號碼 TEL. NO.: 2810 2632

傳真號碼 FAX. NO.: 2810 7702

來函傳真 YOUR FAX.: 2509 9055

3 May 2011

By Fax

Miss Flora Tai
Clerk to Panel on Administration of
Justice and Legal Services
Legislative Council Secretariat
3/F, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Central

Dear Miss Tai,

**Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services -
Law Reform Commission Report on “The Common Law Presumption
that a Boy under 14 is Incapable of Sexual Intercourse**

At the meeting of the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services held on 28 February 2011, Members generally supported the proposal of the Law Reform Commission (LRC) Report on “The Common Law Presumption that a Boy under 14 is Incapable of Sexual Intercourse”. Individual organisations expressed concerns on the issue of minimum age of criminal responsibility. Our response is as follows.

In the light of the recommendation made in the LRC Report on “The Age of Criminal Responsibility in Hong Kong” published in 2000, the Juvenile Offenders Ordinance was amended in 2003 to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from seven to 10 years. The amended Ordinance came into effect on 1 July 2003. The LRC arrived at its recommendation after thorough consideration of the outcome of public consultation and the minimum age of criminal responsibility adopted in

overseas jurisdictions. Some other common law jurisdictions (such as England and Australia) have also set the minimum age of criminal responsibility at 10.

The Administration has all along endeavoured to provide young persons with rehabilitation opportunities under circumstances which are appropriate and permitted by law. Young persons aged under 18 who are arrested for having committed relatively minor criminal offences will usually be cautioned under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme, rather than being subject to sanction under the criminal justice system. Under the common law, there is also a rebuttable presumption of *doli incapax* applicable to children aged from 10 to 14, meaning that a child within this age range is presumed to be incapable of committing a crime. The presumption provides adequate protection for children under the age of 14, as the burden of proof of criminal intent is on the prosecution. Moreover, the standard of proof that the prosecution must adduce in such cases is high. It must be proven beyond reasonable doubt that not only was there *actus reus* with *mens rea*, but also that the child knew that the particular act was not merely naughty or mischievous, but seriously wrong.

The Administration will continue to closely monitor the crime situation of children and young persons under different age groups. At the present stage, there is no plan to further raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs Millie Ng)
for Secretary for Security

c.c.
Secretary, LRC (Attn: Mr Stuart Stoker)