

To,

The Legislative Council Secretariat,

Subcommittee on Poverty.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

On Behalf of “Equal Access to Government services Concern Group for Hong Kong Ethnic Minority”, we want to divert the attention of Poverty Subcommittee to following unbelievable facts. The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau issued the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality (the Guidelines) in 2010 to provide guidance to the relevant bureau, departments and other Public Authorities on promoting racial equality and ensuring equal access to Public Services by Ethnic Minorities. We are really very unhappy to tell you that the major departments (Labour Department, Student Finance Assistance Agency, Housing Department and etc...) which Minorities mostly come across are actually not taking care of Minorities’ need at all.

The language is the biggest barrier for Ethnic Minorities to approach different Public Services. Chinese and English are the official Languages of Hong Kong and mainly, the services are provided in these two languages. For Minorities we have that thought that if they do not know Chinese then they must know English to communicate with the officials. But the fact is that English is not the Mother Tongue of most of the Ethnic Minorities. In their countries, English is also taught like a subject same like in Hong Kong. So, therefore their Understanding of English may be even lower in compare with local. And according to our experience, most of the minorities are not much educated so they always have difficulties in approaching Public Services.

At present, Home Affairs Department commissions the Centre of Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Resident (CHEER) to provide interpretation and translation service to assist ethnic minorities in obtaining information related to Government services. The Statistics of usage of Interpretation and translations services in different departments provided by CHEER in the past three is really discouraging. What we came across are , the frontline government officials are very unwilling to use CHEER services and that is why the utilization rate is so low. Basically there are four modes of Translation services (Telephone, Onsite, Web camera and written) by CHEER, the figures shows very low usage in different departments and some figures are even zero. The Guidelines cover the key Public services which are particularly relevant to

meeting special needs of ethnic minorities and facilitating their integration into the community. But the point is that why the front line officers are not following the Guidelines to provide smooth approach to Public services for Ethnic Minorities.

We can provide the examples from our experience when many Ethnic Minorities suffer a lot because of not able to communicate with the government officials or to get the necessary information related to our rights as HK residents.

First of all, We want to describe about the Housing Department which claim to provide very good service but actually they are not providing any support for those Ethnic Minorities who cannot communicate in English and Chinese. Some of them miss the chance or even their application was cancelled because of not understanding the language well during the interview. Some of them sign the documents which they don't understand properly.

Then We will talk about Student Finance Assistance Agency which is to help the low income families to ease the financial burden and encourage students to study higher. We experienced that many of Ethnic Minorities even do not know that there is such Agency which can help them. Even if some of them know about this but they find the procedures and requirements are very complicated to fulfill. There is not enough promotion of these schemes in different languages and also no support is provided by schools managements even. This situation put an extra pressure on Ethnic Minorities Parents. I personally have experience that on SFAA Staffs English level is also very low, when I try to call the hotline they hang up the phone when I speak in English. This situation is actually really discouraging that they are not willing to help you at all.

Then finally, We will describe about Labour Department and their Employment services. The impression of Labour Department especially in seeking jobs among Ethnic Minorities is quite worse. Mostly, they do not trust on Labour Department in looking for jobs. They often use their personal network to find jobs. According to their experience and sharing even they go to Labour Department, they are not provided any kind of language support there. The jobs posted there are mostly in Chinese which they cannot read at all.

Other than above all situation, still Poverty Commission did not speak much about EM needs and their difficulties. According to our experience, their situation is even worse than local Chinese.

Equal Access to Government services Concern Group for Hong Kong Ethnic Minority

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