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14 March 2013

Ms Alice Leung
Clerk to Panel on Home Affairs
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central Hong Kong

Dear Ms Leung,

About Raising the Legal Gambling Age from 18 to 21

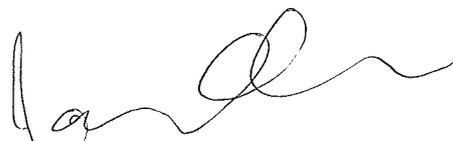
Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2013 relaying to us the views of “No Gamble 21 Alliance” on youth gambling. I am authorized to reply as follows -

In 2011, the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee (“the Committee”) commissioned the PolyU Technology and Consultancy Company Limited to conduct a study on Hong Kong people’s participation in gambling activities. According to the results of the study, the prevalence rates of possible problem gamblers and possible pathological gamblers were 1.9% and 1.4% respectively, which were slightly lower than the corresponding figures of 2.8% and 1.7% in the 2008 study.

The Betting and Lotteries Commission (BLC) has considered the abovementioned study results and noted that given the different contexts and circumstances between Hong Kong and other countries or regions, regulatory regimes of other jurisdictions may not be applicable in Hong Kong. The BLC also noted that the licensed betting conductor in Hong Kong has all along strictly observed the restrictions of legal betting age of 18 (e.g. persons aged under 18 are forbidden by the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) from opening betting accounts, entering off-course betting branches, placing bets or receiving prize monies). As such, it is considered that there is no imminent need to raise the legal gambling age. However, the Government and the BLC will continue to monitor the situation of gambling in Hong Kong and consider whether the relevant proposal may be applicable in Hong Kong as and when necessary.

Since its establishment in 2003, the Ping Wo Fund has been financing preventive and remedial measures to address gambling-related problems. Over the past few years, we have commissioned various organisations to conduct publicity and education programmes targeting young people, with a view to enhancing the understanding of gambling-related problems among young people, parents, teachers, etc., as well as enhancing self control among young people. In addition, we have launched Ping Wo Fund Sponsorship Scheme and Ping Wo Fund School Project Grants since 2009 and 2010 respectively, with the aims of sponsoring non-governmental organizations to conduct public education programmes and activities, and providing sponsorship to schools to organize educational activities as preventive measures for gambling-related problems. We will continue to implement various measures to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kay Kwok', written in a cursive style.

(Miss Kay Kwok)

for Secretary for Home Affairs