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LABOUR AND WELFARE BUREAU
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

Central Government Offices
Tim Mei Avenue
Tamar, Hong Kong

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25 May 2020

Ms Wendy JAN
Clerk to the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms JAN,

**Follow Up to the Meeting of
the Panel on Welfare Services on 9 March 2020**

At the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services held on 9 March 2020, Members requested the Government to provide supplementary information on issues relating to the Social Welfare Department (SWD)'s provision of face masks to residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities in view of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; the number of applications from the aided and non-aided child care centres (CCCs) for the special grant; and the SWD's processing of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) applications. The relevant information is set out below.

The Provision of Face Masks to the Residential Care Homes for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, SWD has provided related units with three rounds of special allowance (for the first two rounds at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 each; for the third round at a rate of \$10,000 or \$6,000) for procurement of personal protective equipment (including face masks) and sanitising items in order to assist welfare service units to strengthen their epidemic prevention measures, covering about 3 500 service units. The relevant service units include those under subventions or contracts by the SWD, all private and self-financing

residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and contract homes, private and self-financing residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), aided and non-aided CCCs, self-financing hostels for street sleepers, and organisations operating After School Care Programme in non-subvented premises, etc.

In addition, the Government has, in two tranches in mid-February and mid-March 2020, provided a total of one million face masks for the staff of subvented, contract, self-financing and private residential service units (including subvented small group homes, children's homes, boy's/girl's homes/hostels, refuge centres for women, RCHEs and RCHDs licensed by the SWD, etc.) so as to assist them to provide continuous services. To strengthen the epidemic prevention measures of residential care homes, the Government announced on 21 March that the number of face masks to be provided for subsidised and private residential care homes will be increased from one million to two million per month. From mid-February to mid-May 2020, the SWD has distributed a total of five million face masks to the above residential care homes by six batches.

The SWD does not have information on the stock of personal protective equipment of relevant residential service units.

The Number of Applications from the Aided CCCs and Non-Aided CCCs for the Special Grant

On 21 February 2020, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved a funding application for establishing the Anti-epidemic Fund (the Fund). The Fund aims to enhance the capability of the Government and other relevant parties in combating COVID-19, and to provide assistance or relief to enterprises and members of the public hard hit by the pandemic or affected by anti-epidemic measures, including provision of a special grant to 565 aided and non-aided CCCs (including CCCs attached to kindergartens) to overcome the financial difficulties arising from the prolonged suspension of service as part of the strategy to contain the epidemic. SWD received a total of 551 applications, including 257 and 294 from aided CCCs and non-aided CCCs respectively.

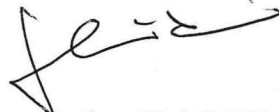
Processing of CSSA Applications by SWD

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the community, the Government has implemented a series of disease control measures in view of the development of the pandemic. These measures include special work arrangement for civil servants and various arrangements to minimise social contact, etc. In this connection, the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) of the SWD have put in place restrictive measures on public services involving face-to-face contact since early February

2020 to reduce the risk of community infection. Nevertheless, the SWD has been implementing special measures, such as facilitating applicants to make use of the application drop boxes outside the SSFUs, or to provide application information by post, fax or email to ensure timely processing of applications for the CSSA and Social Security Allowance (including the Old Age Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance and Disability Allowance) and timely disbursement of the relevant payments to eligible applicants and existing recipients. The SSFUs have also continued to arrange meetings with individual applicants as necessary in order to actively process their applications without delay. In view of the Government's announcement on the gradual resumption of public services made on 28 April, all SSFUs of the SWD have resumed opening to the public starting from 4 May.

Generally, if CSSA applicants or their guardians/appointees can provide all the necessary information, the application procedures can be completed in four weeks. During the period when the SSFUs shortened their opening hours, SWD has processed CSSA applications as usual with the aforementioned special measures. Given that each application involves different circumstances, SWD does not maintain relevant information on the time for approving the applications.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Heidi IP)

for Secretary for Labour and Welfare

c.c.

Director of Social Welfare

(Attn: Miss Rita LAU)