

(Translation)

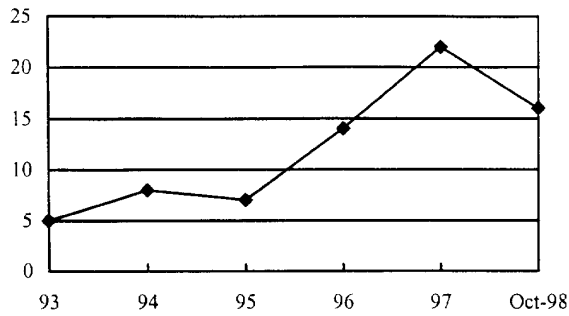
**Submission from the Group of Review of CSSA for Grass Roots of
St. James' Settlement**

No Transparency in the Review of CSSA
Sheer Absurdity in Misleading the Public

Whilst the publication of the Report on the Review of CSSA (“the Review”) has been deferred time and again, the Government has declined to set down a consultation period, neither has it provided any formal channels for public consultation. In so doing, the Government has disregarded our rights and neglected our needs as CSSA recipients. In the course of the Review, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been persistently degrading us and misleading the public into believing that CSSA recipients are lazy people. A sharp increase in the number of unemployed CSSA recipients has recently been recorded as a result of a rising unemployment rate. Against such a background, the Director of Social Welfare (DSW), Mr Andrew LEUNG, repeatedly stressed that government spending on CSSA had gone up substantially by 40% in the recent months and that such an increase in CSSA spending had led to soaring government expenditure. However, the root of the problem lies in the severe shortage of employment opportunities.

Such remarks made by the SWD have shifted the pressure of economic downturn onto those members of the public who are in need of assistance. Therefore, as a group of families that are much concerned with the Review, we set up a concern group, namely the Group of Review of CSSA for Grass Roots (“the Group”), in July 1998. Regarding the Review of CSSA, we would like to state our views as follows:

1. It is found that the percentage of the number of unemployed CSSA recipients against the overall unemployed population in Hong Kong has dropped from last year's 22% to this year's 16% (the figure for August this year), notwithstanding the fact that the unemployment rate in Hong Kong has been staying on the high side throughout this year. Such a trend has proved that DSW's allegation of CSSA system nurturing lazy people is unsubstantiated. Conversely, while more and more people are losing their jobs, the percentage of the number of unemployed CSSA recipients against the overall unemployed population is decreasing rather than increasing. We may attribute such a phenomenon to the degrading remarks made by government officials towards CSSA recipients in the recent months. Even when the unemployed are in severe financial hardship, they are still reluctant to apply for CSSA because the degrading remarks have caused them feelings of shame to live on CSSA.



—◆— The percentage of the number of unemployed CSSA recipients against the overall unemployed population in Hong Kong

2. The SWD has reportedly proposed that single parents should be required to take up full-time jobs if their youngest children are in the age group of 12 to 15. We are very worried about this proposal. Young people studying in secondary schools are in the critical stage of their growth, when parental guidance and instructions are of vital importance. If it is made a compulsory requirement for single parents to take up jobs when their children are most in need of parental care and family support, more youth problems are bound to emerge.

3. The SWD has repeatedly exaggerated the level of CSSA payment for a four-member family, stating that the monthly payment of over \$10,000 to a four-member family compares favourably with the prevailing wage level. However, the monthly payments for CSSA households have included the actual amounts of rent paid. After deducting the rent allowances, the standard rates for an adult and a child are \$1,965 and \$1,795 respectively. The standard rates however are insufficient to meet their monthly expenses.

| Light & Fuel | Household appliances | Food | Travelling | Clothing | Social activities | Miscellaneous | Total |
|--------------|----------------------|---------|------------|----------|-------------------|---------------|---------|
| \$100 | \$170 | \$1,200 | \$120 | \$100 | \$200 | \$100 | \$1,990 |

The Group's Proposal:

The Government's Two Do's and Two Don'ts and Our Two Objections What the Government should not do:

1. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government should not seek to reduce CSSA payments on the pretext that CSSA expenditure has been increasing.
2. The HKSAR Government should not perpetuate the concept of "CSSA nurturing lazy people", so that the public's negative thinking about CSSA recipients may be rectified.

What the Government should do:

1. The HKSAR Government should address the aggravating unemployment problem in Hong Kong, and set up a proper mechanism to gradually relieve CSSA recipients from poverty.
2. The HKSAR Government should overhaul the CSSA system and should take into account the views and the overall needs of CSSA applicants, so as to offer genuine assistance to CSSA recipients and enable them to lead "dignified lives".

In addition, we "strongly object" to the following two recommendations that aim at reducing CSSA payments:

1. The proposal of making it a compulsory requirement for single parents to take up full-time jobs when their youngest children reached the age of 12, instead of the originally required age of 15.
2. The proposal to adopt a broadbrush approach in capping the number of CSSA-eligible members in a household at four, and to revert to the old system of offering descending rates of allowances.

Lastly, the Group would like to put forward five requests in relation to the Review:

1. Increased and expeditious supply of public rental housing (PRH) flats

The Government should expedite the supply of PRH flats with a view to reducing the waiting time for applicants. This serves to lower the housing expenses to be borne by the parents when they rejoin the workforce, thereby enabling them to make ends meet.

2. The provision of child care services with flexibility

It is imperative for the Government to provide flexible child care services at low costs to cater to the needs of different age groups, so as to enable CSSA recipients to set their mind at ease when they opt to rejoin the workforce. Meanwhile, it is imperative that additional child care centres be set up and extended service hours be provided to cater to the needs of those parents who have to work longer hours or those who have to work on shifts.

3. Retraining courses must meet the needs of the market

To provide tailor-made courses that suit the needs of the market, the Government and the Employees Retraining Board should revise the contents of a number of training courses which no longer meet the needs of the market.

4. Stop importing labour

In order to safeguard the employment opportunities of local workers, the Government should cease the operation of labour importation schemes as soon as possible.

5. The provision of various protection schemes

We urge the Government to formulate a proper social security system incorporating retirement protection and unemployment relief, with a view to coming up with a security system that can offer protection appropriate to different needs of the public.

In the face of persistent economic downturn and declining government revenue, the Government is still generous enough to put in enormous amount of public money to encourage the public to purchase properties by way of introducing a number of interest-free loan schemes. On the other hand, the Government is prepared to cut its overall expenditure at the expense of those who are living on CSSA. Such a practice has reflected the Government's total indifference to our needs for basic protection.

In view of the prevalence of cases involving domestic violence and the immense pressure of economic depression upon the grassroots, we urge the HKSAR Government to take a square look at the genuine needs of CSSA families and to show more concern about our predicament, if further family tragedies were to be averted.

Residents' representatives:

WONG Sau-ping (黃秀屏), CHAN Shun-ching (陳舜清) and WU Woon-mei (鄔煥美)

Social workers' representatives:

CHENG Shuk-ching (鄭淑貞) and CHIU Lai-chun (趙麗珍)

Correspondence: The Group of Review of CSSA for Grassroots
 c/o Group and Community Work Division,
 St James' Settlement,
 7/F, 85 Stone Nullah Lane,
 Wanchai.

Telephone No.: 2835 4371

Fax No.: 2834 1484

E-mail: gccdfle@sjs.org.hk

**Current situation regarding the number of CSSA cases involving
the unemployed and the single-parent households in Hong Kong**

| Year | Unemployment rate in HK | | | CSSA cases | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| | (%) | No. of unemployed | Annual growth rate (%) | Total no. of cases | No. of cases receiving CSSA on the grounds of unemployment | Percentage of CSSA cases in the category of "unemployment" (%) | Total no. of single-parent households in HK | No. of CSSA cases involving single-parent households |
| 93 | 2 | 56300 | 2.9 | 85738 | 3233 | 5.7 | | 5676 |
| 94 | 1.9 | 56200 | -0.2 | 99249 | 4268 | 7.6 | | 6846 |
| 95 | 3.2 | 95600 | 70.1 | 116838 | 6559 | 6.9 | | 7477 |
| 96 | 2.8 | 86100 | -9.9 | 145756 | 11760 | 13.7 | 77979 | 11172 |
| 97 | 2.2 | 71300 | -17.2 | 175331 | 15708 | 22 | | 15308 |
| 98 Jun | 4.4 | 142600 | | 207124 | 22622 | 16 | | 18899 |
| 98 Aug | 4.8 | 158000 | 10.8 | 215028 | 25116 | 15 | | 20248 |
| 98 Oct | 5 | 174900 | | 222699 | 28083 | 16 | | 21423 |

Source: Social Welfare Department