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14 March 2003

Clerk to Finance Committee
Legislation Council
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

Second VR Scheme

At the Finance Committee meeting on 21 February 2003, Members approved the funding request for launching a second Voluntary Retirement (VR) Scheme. During the discussion, some members queried why the Labour Officer grade was included in the second VR. They were of the view that the inclusion of the grade in the scheme would adversely affect the service provided to the public. We undertook to convey Members' view to the relevant bureau for consideration.

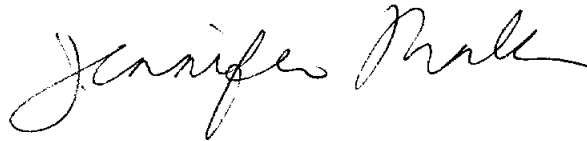
We have consulted the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour and Commissioner of Labour. They have reconsidered the matter and have come to the view that the original decision to include the Labour Officer and other departmental grades in the second VR Scheme should stand, for the following reasons :

- (a) For the past years, Labour Department (LD) has all along been identifying areas to re-prioritise, re-organise and re-engineer its work with a view to enhancing its efficiency in the provision of various services to the public. As LD will continue to do this, there is room in reducing their overall staffing complement. Notwithstanding this, the number of VR applications, if any, that LD will approve will depend on operational exigencies, so as to ensure that their core services to the public will not be adversely affected.

- (b) The opening up of all departmental, general and common grades in the LD for inclusion in the second VR Scheme will help reduce the expenditure on Personal Emoluments to achieve savings. This is also in line with the target of reducing the size of civil service by 10% to around 160,000 by 2006-07 as announced by the Chief Executive in his 2003 Policy Address.

We support the decision of LD. The inclusion of Labour Officer grade in the second VR will help achieve the cost cutting and establishment control targets. In deciding the number of VR takers to be released, LD will retain full discretion and ensure that the service provided to the public will not be adversely affected.

Yours faithfully,



(Miss Jennifer Mak)
for Secretary for the Civil Service

c.c. Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
(Attn : Mr Manfred Wong)
Permanent Secretary for Economic Development & Labour
(Attn : Mr Matthew Cheung)
Commissioner for Labour