

Our Ref : HWF ES 18/36 (04)
Your Ref : CB2/PS/1/04

Tel. No. : 3150 8926
Fax No. : 3150 8930

23 October 2006

Clerk to Subcommittee on review of the
Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme
(Attn: Miss Betty Ma)
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Miss Ma,

Substantial Reply to the Meeting on 27 April 2006

I refer to the minutes of the meeting of the LegCo Subcommittee on review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme held on 27 April 2006, wherein the Administration was requested to provide a substantial reply to the requests of the Members and deputations by October 2006. Further to our interim reply on 10 July 2006, we are providing you with the requested information as follows:

The review of Disregarded Earnings (DE)

The provision of DE under the CSSA Scheme allows recipients to keep a portion of their monthly earnings without affecting their CSSA entitlement, thus encouraging them to find and maintain employment. At present, all categories of recipients in cases which have been on CSSA for not less than three months can benefit from the provision of DE. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) is currently undertaking a review of the arrangements for DE under the CSSA Scheme, and we will consult the

stakeholders on the outcome of the review in 2006-07.

Referral procedures for the application of CSSA

For due-to-be discharged prisoners who wish to apply for CSSA immediately on release, they may either make an application for CSSA by post before their release or request for referrals by Government departments e.g. through Programme Officers of Correctional Services Department (CSD) or other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Upon receipt of an application, the SWD will process it as soon as possible upon the prisoner's discharge. Normally, able-bodied unemployed adults aged 15 to 59 (including discharged prisoners) who meet the eligibility criteria start receiving their monthly entitlement one month after the date of application. For eligible who are old, disabled or medically certified to be in ill health, they normally start receiving their monthly entitlement right from the date of application.

To shorten the processing time of CSSA application submitted by discharged prisoners in financial difficulties, the SWD and the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention (SRACP) and Society for Community Organisation (SoCO) have streamlined the referral procedures to the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs). In order to improve the efficiency of the referral system, the SRACP and SoCO would only use the form for referring exceptional genuine cases that they considered justified for putting forward to SWD for consideration of waiving the one-month waiting period. For those discharged prisoners in immediate financial difficulties, urgent payment can be arranged within a few days if their eligibility can be established.

Accommodation and employment assistance for the discharged prisoners

The SRACP and SoCO have been encouraged to make use of the existing accommodation resources such as singleton hostels run by NGOs under the subvention of SWD for discharged prisoners, as well as singleton hostels under Home Affairs Department (HAD) which have referral systems for needy general compassionate cases.

The Singleton Hostel Programme is implemented to provide accommodation for singletons displaced by the implementation of the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance. Compassionate cases are accepted when there are vacancies in the hostels. HAD has already reminded the NGOs about the referral systems for needy general compassionate cases.

To further enhance our support to discharged prisoners in this regard, SWD will implement, tentatively from January 2007, a two-year pilot project to provide enhanced accommodation assistance to discharged prisoners

who have genuine hardship by assisting them to pay rent for suitable abodes for a short period of time immediately upon their discharge. Besides, since assisting the discharged prisoners to find employment provides a more sustainable solution, SWD will also strengthen the employment support services for discharged prisoners under the pilot project. At present, there are two subvented employment service units providing job training and placement services specifically for discharged prisoners. We plan to increase the number of such units from two to five. We believe that this two-pronged approach would be welcomed by discharged prisoners.

Please let me know if you need any further information on the above.

Your sincerely,

(D. C. CHEUNG)
for Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

c.c. Commissioner of Correctional Services
(Attn : Mr. YAU Chi-chiu, Assistant Commissioner (Rehabilitation))

Director of Home Affairs
(Attn : Mrs. Angelina CHEUNG, Assistant Director (4))

Director of Social Welfare
(Attn : Mr. CHEUNG Hing-wah, Assistant Director (Youth and Corrections)
Mr. CHENG Chok-man, Chief Social Security Officer
(Social Security)1)

Internal

Mr. Freely CHENG, Principal Assistant Secretary (Family)
Ms. Rosaline WONG, Chief Executive Officer (Elderly Services and Social Security)