

LCQ1: Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill

Following is a question by the Hon Lam San-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

The Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill (the Bill) aims at reforming and consolidating the law relating to the responsibilities and rights of parents for children, providing for the appointment and powers of guardians, etc, and requiring the court to, in giving the ruling, regard the best interests of a child as the paramount consideration. At the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services of this Council on June 17 last year, most members considered that the authorities should expeditiously reactivate the legislative proposal. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the reasons for not having commenced the legislative process of the Bill after a lapse of nine months, and whether the Government will immediately commence the relevant legislative process at the request of members?

Reply:

President,

The Government endeavours to implement a number of measures to support divorced families with children in coping with challenges in various aspects such as finance, child care and parenting, psychological well-being and social relationships, so as to assist them in fulfilling the positive functions of a family and safeguarding the well-being of children.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) prepared the draft Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill in 2015 which introduces a statutory list covering parental responsibilities and rights and major decisions concerning the child's upbringing, and requires parents to obtain the express consent of the other parent or to notify them in advance for making such decisions, with an aim to reforming and consolidating the law relating to parents' responsibilities and rights for their children. However, many stakeholders, including single parents, expressed concerns about the legislative proposal at that time. Those who do not support the bill considered that the legislative proposal would not help divorced parents in resolving conflicts, but might instead cause more problems for families with domestic violence background. Single-parent groups were also concerned that the requirement to "obtain the other party's consent for major decisions concerning the child" would be exploited by a troublemaking ex-spouse with malicious intent to harass their former partner, causing distress to the child. Hence, the Government shelved the legislative proposal and focused instead on implementing a series of support measures to strengthen support

for divorced families, including separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children. In this connection, the Government increased resources in 2019 to set up five Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres (SCSCs) to provide one-stop specialised services for divorced families; provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services for families in need (including separated/divorced families) through the 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres; and adopted a multi-pronged approach of public education and publicity to foster community awareness of the well-being of children of divorced families and promote the message of co-parenting.

To gauge the latest views of stakeholders on the legislative proposal, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) collected feedback from service users through the SCSCs and IFSCs in the second half of 2024. Results of the questionnaire survey indicated that the views of divorced parents on the subject remain diverse. About 70 per cent of the respondents agreed to inform their ex-spouses before making major decisions concerning their children (e.g. further studies, emigration, surgery, choice of religion, change of name, etc), but the percentage of those who agreed dropped to 56 per cent if the consent or written confirmation of their ex-spouses had to be obtained first. More than 61 per cent of the respondents opposed to allowing ex-spouses who do not live with their children to participate in major decisions affecting their children's welfare and future through legislation. In fact, the court has been encouraging divorced parents to take an active part in matters relating to the life and care of their children provided that it is in the best interests of the children, and their responsibilities do not end just because of the breakdown of their marriage or relationship. In recent years, when handling matrimonial proceedings, the court has been making judgments based on the principle of "joint parental responsibility" and allow both parents to participate directly in the lives of their children as far as possible in suitable cases (e.g. those not involving domestic violence).

We understand that there are views in the community that the legislation would help clearly reflect the current criteria of the court in making judgments, thereby promoting public understanding of the importance of joint parental responsibilities after divorce. However, there is in general still a lack of awareness and even misunderstanding of custody orders in the community. Divorced parents tend to focus on defending their custody rights, which may lead them to overlook the continuous joint parental responsibilities with the other parent with regard to the principle of safeguarding their children's best interests. Therefore, the Government considers that prior to deciding whether to resume the legislative process, we should step up public education to change the entrenched concepts as mentioned above. This would enable divorced parents to understand their joint responsibilities over their children, instead of initiating unnecessary legal proceedings in fighting for the custody rights of their children, which would jeopardise the best interests of their children.

As I pointed out at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services in November 2024, since single parents have clearly expressed their concerns about the legislation (no matter whether the concern is attributed to a lack

of understanding of the legislative proposal or to a dissenting view), the Government should not force the resumption of the legislative process. The Government is willing to collaborate with the legal sector and non-governmental organisations specialising in supporting divorced families to explain to divorced parents the essence of joint parental responsibilities and the benefits of legislation. If the majority of stakeholders can overcome their deep-rooted concerns, the legislative process will naturally come to fruition, at the same time avoiding disputes in the community and preserving social harmony. In this connection, the LWB and the SWD plan to launch a new and enhanced public education programme next year to promote the concept of continuous joint responsibility of divorced parents for their children at various fronts of the community. This will include enabling single parents to fully understand the current criteria of the court's judgments on custody orders, alleviating their concerns about the legislative proposal. After rolling out the public education programme for a period of time, the Government will evaluate its effectiveness in embedding the concept of "joint parental responsibility" in the minds of divorced parents, and further consider whether the legislative proposal should be put back on the agenda.

LCQ15: Supporting villages in organising mega events

â€œFollowing is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Youth and Home Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

It is learnt that every year, numerous festive and cultural events take place in villages throughout the New Territories. These events are hosted by the Rural Committees (RCs) and attract a large number of visitors from the Mainland and overseas for sightseeing. However, there are views pointing out that the organisation of such events requires significant human, material and financial resources, which places a considerable financial burden on the resource-constrained RCs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government provided financial and manpower support for the following rural mega events in the past three years: (i) the Lam Tsuen Wishing Festival, (ii) the Cheung Chau Bun Festival, (iii) the Tin Hau Festival Parade of Yuen Long, (iv) the Hau Wong Festival of Tung Chung, (v) the Dragon Boat Races during the Dragon Boat Festival, and (vi) the Jiao Festivals of various villages; if so, of the details, and set out in a table the funding amount and number of support staff for each event; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether, in order to fully implement the concept of "Tourism is everywhere in Hong Kong", the Government will provide direct funding to various RCs and consider introducing a new project type of Rural Festive and Cultural Events under the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme, so as to subsidise villages to organise events with distinctive festive characteristics; if not, of the reasons for that;

(3) as there are views that the development of rural mega events and tourism in the New Territories requires the participation of various RCs, and yet it is learnt that the monthly subvention granted by the Government to each RC ranges from \$15,300 to \$16,700, with the last adjustment to the subvention amount made in 2018, whether the Government will adjust such amount upwards based on changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(4) whether, in addition to strengthening the promotion of rural mega events through the Tourism Commission and the Home Affairs Department, the Government will draw on the Mainland's experience and use means such as live streaming and short video clips by rural online influencers to showcase the natural scenery, traditional culture and lifestyle of New Territories villages, so as to deepen the understanding of the public and tourists about the motherland and the New Territories, thereby promoting the development of rural mega events?

Reply:

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Kenneth Lau, in consultation with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Environment and Ecology Bureau, a consolidated reply is as follows:

The Government has always been supportive of the organisation of major rural events, with a view to promoting and preserving traditional culture. Among other things, the Home Affairs Department implements the Community Involvement Programme through which eligible organisations, including non-governmental organisations such as Rural Committees (RCs) and district organisations, may apply for funding support to organise projects featuring local characteristics and popular festive celebrations as well as cultural, artistic and recreational activities to promote district harmony. In the past three years, more than \$14 million has been allocated under the Community Involvement Programme to subsidise RCs and other district organisations in the New Territories in organising some of the major rural events mentioned in the question. In addition, all District Offices (DOs) in the New Territories have been in close liaison and collaboration with RCs and relevant district organisations, including the provision of manpower support to assist the organisers in carrying out relevant activities upon their invitation. Other government departments have also made concerted efforts to provide assistance for the activities in accordance with their respective duties and remit, including venue arrangements, crowd management, traffic diversions and road

closures, environmental hygiene and public order. All of the above work is undertaken by the DOs and other departments concerned with their existing resources and manpower. Hence, a breakdown of the subsidy amount and manpower involved is not available.

Besides, the Countryside Conservation Office under the Environment and Ecology Bureau also subsidises local non-profit-making organisations to organise diverse and innovative countryside conservation and revitalisation projects through the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS). One of the project types funded under the CCFS is Cultural Rehabilitation/Revitalisation Projects, which aims at enhancing public appreciation and awareness in conservation of target cultural assets. This project type encompasses elements of organising countryside festive events for attracting villagers to return to their villages for gatherings. For instance, festive activities were organised in Kuk Po last year for the Kuk Po Spring Equinox Festival in celebration of the new year, introducing the public to the Hakka culture, the features of Hakka cuisine and other Chinese New Year traditions.

With regard to the promotion of major rural events, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) has been promoting mega events and festivals through various channels, including social media posts and invitation to KOLs for experiencing Hong Kong in person, as well as production of a series of promotional content, including videos, outdoor advertising, programmes in collaboration with renowned media, to carry out promotion in different source markets around the world and boost promotion impact by complementing with contents on HKTb's one-stop travel information platform Discover Hong Kong. These include "Hong Kong Great Outdoors", a promotional platform featuring hiking, beaches and outdoor activities, leisure and sightseeing, as well as island hopping. It also promotes traditional festivities, such as Cheung Chau Bun Festival, Dragon Boat Water Parade of Tai O, Hung Shing Festival. These promotional contents introduce to tourists the natural scenery, traditional culture and lifestyle of villages in the New Territories and attract them to come to Hong Kong. Efforts are also made by the DOs concerned in promoting activities in their respective districts through different channels, including websites, social media platforms and local networks.

The Government has always attached great importance to rural affairs and, through the provision of monthly subvention to RCs since the 1960s, to recognise and support their work. The rates and Government rents of RCs are also paid in full by the Government. The subvention to RCs is not subject to an adjustment mechanism approved by the Legislative Council. In 2018, the Government increased the subvention to RCs with reference to the changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index. There are three levels of RC subventions at \$15,300, \$15,800 and \$16,700 per month respectively, which were set according to factors like the size of the RCs to cover their daily operating expenses. RCs may also apply for government subsidies for eligible rural activities through the various funding programmes mentioned above.

LCQ10: Developing Hong Kong into fashion design hub in Asia

Following is a question by the Hon Sunny Tan and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

As proposed by the Chief Executive in the 2023 Policy Address, the Hong Kong Fashion Design Week (Fashion Week), branded as Hong Kong Fashion Fest (Fashion Fest), would be held annually starting from 2024. In the 2024 Policy Address, it is proposed to make the new flagship Fashion Week an annual signature event to develop Hong Kong into a fashion design hub in Asia. It has been reported that the inaugural Fashion Fest was held in early December last year with resounding success. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the performance of the inaugural Fashion Fest, including the number of participants, the countries or regions from which the participants or attendees of the Fashion Fest came, and the media effectiveness, etc.;

(2) of the plans and measures in place to make the Fashion Fest an annual signature event with more international and spectacular elements (including how to step up overseas publicity on the Fashion Fest in the international fashion arena, the industrial and commercial sectors, [etc.]), and to reinforce Hong Kong's positioning as the premier textile and fashion hub in the Asian region; and

(3) as I have learnt that the fashion collections of an overseas brand were well received and successfully sold at the inaugural Fashion Fest, and the brand's founder cum designer subsequently moved to Hong Kong to develop his/her career and business, whether the Government will consider adopting more proactive policy incentives and initiatives (e.g. reduction of profits tax and business registration fees) to attract brands and designers from the Mainland and regions along the Belt and Road such as Southeast Asia to move to Hong Kong to set up their presence, so as to establish more Asian international brands based in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive has announced in his 2024 Policy Address to make the Hong Kong Fashion Design Week an annual signature event, developing Hong Kong

into a fashion design hub in Asia. The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) has branded the event as Hong Kong Fashion Fest to consolidate different fashion design events and introduce innovative elements and affiliate activities annually, promoting Hong Kong's fashion and textile design brands as well as promoting Hong Kong as a prime destination for hosting major cultural and creative events.

In consultation with Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Sunny Tan is as follows:

(1) The inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest was funded by the Cultural and Creative Industries Development Agency (CCIDA) under the CSTB, with the core programmes took place from November 20 to December 4, 2024. During the period, the CCIDA carried out online and offline publicity and promotion, and invited local and international media to Hong Kong to experience in person the atmosphere of Hong Kong fashion scene. The inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest gathered around 160 000 participants from the industries and the public across 25 countries or regions. More than 500 media outlets and related representatives attended the events, and the event-related videos on social media garnered over 4.6 million views.

(2) The inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest fully showcased Hong Kong's potential and advantages as a fashion design hub in Asia, laying the foundation for its future development into an annual signature event.

Preparation work for the Hong Kong Fashion Fest 2025 commenced at the end of last year. The CCIDA will fund and promote potential fashion design projects that align with the objectives of the Hong Kong Fashion Fest through the CreateSmart Initiative (CSI), and actively encourage collaboration within the local fashion industry. We will continue to promote the Hong Kong Fashion Fest to countries in Europe and along the Belt and Road, attracting prestigious fashion brands and industry players to Hong Kong to participate in the event and expand their collaboration opportunities with international fashion organisations and brands. We will also continue to optimise and enrich the content of the Hong Kong Fashion Fest, actively introducing different types of fashion design events to further strengthen the international appeal and influence of the Hong Kong Fashion Fest, fostering Hong Kong's role as a prominent textile and fashion hub in Asia.

On publicity, the CCIDA will adopt comprehensive public relations and marketing strategies, such as utilising digital media promotions, inviting local and overseas fashion celebrities to participate in the event, and organising networking activities for industry stakeholders, etc. in order to enhance the international visibility of the Hong Kong Fashion Fest and local fashion design.

(3) The Hong Kong Fashion Fest creates a platform for local and overseas fashion designers and brands, as well as industry leaders and relevant professionals, by providing opportunities for exchanges and showcasing their works. We are pleased to note that a local fashion designer has received multiple inquiries for retail and business collaborations from both local and

international sources after showcasing his works at the inaugural Hong Kong Fashion Fest. The fashion designer subsequently met with the leading figures in French fashion design industry to discuss potential collaborations for entering the French market. In addition, a Southeast Asian fashion designer has successfully increased her brand's exposure and sold a few thousand high-end fashion pieces through her participation in the international fashion show of the Hong Kong Fashion Fest. Eventually, she decided to continue developing her fashion career and business in Hong Kong. We believe that the Hong Kong Fashion Fest will help attract more international brands and talents from Asia to establish their base in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong offers an ideal business environment for foreign investors, featuring the advantages of low tax rates and a simple tax system, as well as simple and efficient procedures for foreign entrepreneurs to register their companies and apply for work visas. The CCIDA will actively liaise with InvestHK to provide support for local and overseas fashion brands seeking to develop their businesses in Hong Kong, and assist creative talent and enterprises in establishing themselves here.

LCQ22: Special child care centres

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

The special child care centres (SCCCs) under the Social Welfare Department provide whole day training and care for children with moderate to severe disabilities to facilitate their growth and development, helping them prepare for articulation to primary education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of children receiving services provided by SCCC in various districts in the past five years (with a breakdown by type of disability), as well as their average waiting time for such services;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the respective numbers and percentages of children receiving services provided by SCCC who have successfully articulated to mainstream schools and special schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether SCCC will provide follow-up services to the children mentioned in (2); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it will regularly assess and review the teaching plans of SCCCs, so as to ensure that children receiving such services can adapt to social development and better articulate to primary education; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In response to Hon Lillian Kwok's question, our reply is as follows.

(1) and (2) As of the end of January 2025, there are 50 Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs), including six Residential Special Child Care Centres, across the territory providing full-day training and care for children aged two to six with moderate to severe disabilities. Children assessed to have the following developmental problems may register for SCCC service waitlist through the Central Referral System for Rehabilitation Services (CRSRehab):

- (i) moderately or severely mentally handicapped;
- (ii) moderately or severely physically handicapped;
- (iii) deaf or with severe to profound hearing impairment;
- (iv) blind or with severe visual impairment; or
- (v) severe behavioural/emotional problems, hyperactive disposition or autistic disorder.

CRSRehab allows parents to register their children under the age of two in advance for the service waitlist. However, service allocation will only be provided once the child reaches the age of two and when a service vacancy becomes available.

To ensure children with special needs receive training and support as early as possible, they may, while waitlisted for SCCC service, concurrently apply for and receive services at Early Education and Training Centres (EETCs) or On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) as transitional service, pending SCCC service placement. The multi-disciplinary service teams of OPRS also provide support to teachers and child care workers at kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres participating in OPRS.

Children on the SCCC waiting list who are not receiving the aforementioned transitional services may apply for a training subsidy under the Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services, without being subject to any means test. They may utilise the subsidy to acquire self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services run by recognised service providers to receive training as early as possible.

The numbers of service users for SCCCs and the average waiting time, broken down by the eleven administrative districts of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in the past five years, are tabulated below:

District	Number of service users				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25 (as at December 31, 2024)
Central/Western/ Southern & Islands	213	231	235	227	233
Eastern/Wan Chai	187	187	193	216	212
Kwun Tong	210	198	223	230	209
Wong Tai Sin/ Sai Kung	265	278	284	299	300
Kowloon City/ Yau Tsim Mong	189	177	198	240	239
Sham Shui Po	136	138	131	148	168
Sha Tin	183	178	184	211	190
Tai Po/North	217	223	226	223	231
Yuen Long	182	201	200	210	226
Tsuen Wan/ Kwai Tsing	219	237	203	227	229
Tuen Mun	112	105	121	161	194
Total	2 113	2 153	2 198	2 392	2 431

Average waiting time (in months) (Note 1 and 2)				
2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
17.5	19.9	20.2	19.3	19.2

Note 1: As the average waiting time is compiled on a financial-year basis covering April 1 of a year to March 31 of the next year, the figure for 2024-25 is not available.

Note 2: The figure includes the waiting time of children before they reach the age of two, but does not include the waiting time of pre-school rehabilitation service users who are receiving EETCs or OPRS as transitional service, or users who are waiting for a change of service type/choice of centre.

The SWD does not maintain data on the number of SCCC service users categorised by type of disability, nor does it have information on the number of SCCC service users admitted to mainstream or special schools.

(3) and (4) Each child with special needs undergoes periodic developmental assessments upon admission to and during their training at SCCC. The results

of these assessments are used to design individualised training programmes that set learning goals tailored to each child. This approach aims to help children with special needs develop their abilities to the fullest extent and build a strong foundation for their future education and development. To enhance the effectiveness of transition from pre-school to primary education, a collaborative mechanism has been established among the Education Bureau (EDB), the SWD, the Department of Health, and the Hospital Authority. This mechanism allows primary schools to gain an early understanding of the special needs of incoming students when they promote from pre-school centres/kindergartens to primary schools, so as to assist them in successful integration into primary school life. With parental consent, pre-school rehabilitation service units subvented by the SWD prepare progress reports for students promoting to Primary One. These reports are transferred to the recipient schools via the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) of the EDB before the commencement of the new school year.

Red flag hoisted at Stanley Main Beach

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (March 19) that due to big waves, the red flag has been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at the beach.