

Transcript of remarks by SLW on one-off grant to local citizens confirmed COVID-19 positive (with photo/video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, this afternoon (November 23) on the one-off grant to local citizens who have been confirmed COVID-19 positive:

Reporter: Mr Law, Secretary. First of all, from what you said earlier, you are hoping to help people from low-income families who may have their income cut because of their infection, but can you clarify whether there will be any means test? If there is no means test, how can you ensure these people are actually from low-income families that they actually have their income slashed because of COVID-19 infection? Looking at that, aside from the impact after they were infected, there is also the issue of close contacts. If they are from low-income families, they are required to take a two-week mandatory quarantine. They also have their income affected. Why are these people not benefitting from the subsidy? My third question is how you would ensure that there will not be abuse. Can you also clarify whether there will be any age limits? Thank you.

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: Let us go back to the question about means test. There will be no means test. That is what I have just described the conditions (of eligibility of the one-off grant), namely those who have substantial reduction in income and will be suffering from financial difficulties. They will be eligible to apply for this ex-gratia payment (one-off grant). I do not expect that some high-income groups will be entitled to such circumstances. The strictest way is to do a means test, but then you understand that doing a means test will prolong the application process. It can be hard for the applicants, too, because they may have to provide such a lot of information before the application is approved, and they are already suffering from COVID-19. To balance all these considerations, we consider that these broad considerations or conditions eligible for the grant will be sufficient to cover primarily those who are grassroots.

As for the issue about close contacts, we have actually considered whether we should provide some benefits for those who are classified as close contacts. In fact, to look at the discussion in the past couple of days, not just in the past few days – because the idea was actually raised to us by some of the experts during the meeting of the expert advisory group more than a week ago on a Saturday, so we have been thinking about this particular measure for slightly more than a week's time. One of the major considerations of any government action to provide any benefits is to consider the possibility of abuse. For this one-off grant for those who are COVID-19 positive and hospitalised, we do consider that the risk (of abuse) is quite minimal. In fact, we are just targeting at those who belong to the grassroots, who are employed or self-employed, and who suffer from the loss

of income. So, we do not expect that will create any substantial abuse.

But for the case of close contacts, it can be more volatile I would say. The way to deal with abuse can be even far more complicated and expensive than a process of providing such a benefit to such an individual. So, we have decided not to include those who are classified as close contacts into the circumstances.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

