

Hong Kong Customs arrests two female grocery store owners suspected of operating money service without licence

Hong Kong Customs arrested two female owners of a grocery store on July 21 and today (August 10) respectively. They were suspected of operating a money service without a licence, in contravention of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Ordinance (AMLO).

Customs had earlier discovered a post on a social media platform alleging that a female owner of a grocery store in Tai Po failed to remit money after receiving a payment for remittance from a foreign domestic helper (FDH).

Customs officers then swiftly conducted an investigation and found that the grocery store did not have a valid money service operator licence on the date of receiving the remittance payment. The two female owners of the store, aged 44 and 19, were subsequently arrested on July 21 and today respectively.

An investigation is ongoing and the two arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Under the AMLO, a person who wishes to operate a remittance or money changing service needs to first obtain a licence from the Customs and Excise Department. The maximum penalty for such operators without a valid licence upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Customs has been striving to combat unlicensed money services. Regarding the aforesaid case, Customs has already contacted relevant consulate offices and FDH organisations to arrange related educational talks and offer tips for choosing remittance services for FDHs so as to enhance their understanding of the AMLO.

Customs reminds FDHs not to procure services from unlicensed money service operators. FDHs can visit the Customs website (eservices.customs.gov.hk/MSOS/index?request_locale=en) to verify the licence status of service providers if they are found to be suspicious. Moreover, when receiving remittance services, FDHs should avoid choosing the option of "Pay First, Remit Later" and should verify the completion of a remittance immediately at the shop.

Customs appealed for the co-operation of FDH employers and agencies to spread the above messages to their serving or newly arrived FDHs. They could work together to assist FDHs in choosing a proper money service operator carefully in order to protect the benefits of FDHs.

Members of the public may report any suspected unlicensed money service operation to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).