

LegCo to debate motion for adjournment of Council on impact of recent China-United States relations on Hong Kong's economy

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The Legislative Council (LegCo) will hold a meeting on Wednesday (December 5) at 11.30am (or immediately after the meeting for the Chief Executive's Question Time to be held at 11am) in the Chamber of the LegCo Complex. During the meeting, Mr Chung Kwok-pan will move a motion for the adjournment of the Council under Rule 16(4) of the Rules of Procedure. The motion states: "That this Council do now adjourn for the purpose of debating the following issue: the impact of the recent China-United States relations on Hong Kong's economy."

On other Members' motions, Members will continue to debate a motion on studying the enactment of an ordinance on regulating subdivided units. The motion, moved by Mrs Regina Ip, states: "That at present, there are in Hong Kong over 150 000 families and elderly singletons waiting for public rental housing, with an average waiting time of 5.3 years, and quite a number of applicants live in units of flats subdivided into separate units (commonly known as 'subdivided units'); according to the estimate of the Government in 2017, there were about 91 800 households living in subdivided units across the territory; the Chief Executive has undertaken in the newly released Policy Address that the Government will actively facilitate various short-term community initiatives to increase the supply of transitional housing and allow wholesale conversion of industrial buildings for transitional housing; in the light of these new initiatives, it is believed that quite a number of transitional housing units leased out in the form of subdivided units will emerge in Hong Kong, but the existing Buildings Ordinance cannot comprehensively regulate the safety of flat subdivision works; in this connection, this Council urges the Government to study the enactment of an ordinance on regulating subdivided units, the contents of which include:

(1) by drawing reference from the Housing Act 2004 of the United Kingdom, establishing a licensing system for regulating the operation of subdivided units, and setting standards for the facilities, number of occupants and area of units, so as to ensure a comfortable and safe living environment for households;

(2) requiring the installation of separate water and electricity meters for each subdivided unit to prevent overcharging of water and electricity tariffs by landlords; and

(3) regulating the rate of rental increase for subdivided units to prevent the households from being heavily burdened by rental."

Ms Alice Mak, Mr Vincent Cheng, Mr Leung Yiu-chung and Mr Andrew Wan will move separate amendments to Mrs Regina Ip's motion.

Meanwhile, Mr Jeremy Tam will move a motion on legislating for the protection of whistle-blowers. The motion states: "That, unless insiders of business organisations or government agencies (whistle-blowers) divulge that acts endangering public interests have occurred in their organisations or agencies, it is invariably difficult for the public or the media to verify the occurrence of such incidents; many past incidents involving significant public interests in Hong Kong, such as the unlawful sewage discharge by the sewage treatment contractor of Tuen Mun Pillar Point Valley Landfill in contravention of the standard requirements of the Environmental Protection Department, the frequent glitches in the new Air Traffic Control System of the Civil Aviation Department after its launch, and the shortened steel bars of the diaphragm walls at Hung Hom Station of the Shatin to Central Link of the MTR Corporation Limited, would have gone unnoticed if no one had blown the whistle, and the public would not have known the truth; since there is no dedicated legislation in Hong Kong for protecting whistle-blowers and those who stand up for justice are often subjected to reprisals, including various retributive acts such as harassment, discriminatory actions, dismissal and litigation, many insiders are afraid to blow the whistle; since many countries in the world, including the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan, have already enacted dedicated legislation to protect whistle-blowers, this Council urges the SAR Government to expeditiously enact a whistle-blowing protection law to protect whistle-blowers and safeguard public interests; the areas of legislation should cover:

(1) providing statutory protection to whistle-blowers if the incidents disclosed involve criminal offences, breach of legal obligation, miscarriage of justice, threat to public safety or health, environmental damage, abuse of powers, waste of public money, etc., so as to guard them against any unfair treatment, such as punitive actions like dismissal, pay reduction, demotion, transfer, suspension, financial penalty and denial of learning opportunities;

(2) requiring all business organisations and government agencies to formulate their own internal measures on protecting whistle-blowers, including the setting up of a well-defined mechanism respectively for reporting incidents and protecting whistle-blowers, so as to stamp out any possible retributive acts;

(3) allowing whistle-blowers to disclose to the public incidents endangering public interests in ways they deem fit, including using the media or the Legislative Council as the channels, in addition to the internal reporting mechanism mentioned above;

(4) requiring any persons or organisations responsible for handling the secrets divulged by a whistle-blower to maintain the strictest confidentiality of the whistle-blower's personal information; and

(5) allowing whistle-blowers to apply for personal protection measures from the judicial authorities when they or their families feel their personal safety or freedom under threat."

Ms Claudia Mo, Mr Kenneth Leung and Mr Chan Hak-kan will move separate amendments to Mr Jeremy Tam's motion.

During the meeting, Members will also ask the Government 22 questions on various policy areas, six of which require oral replies.

The agenda of the above meeting can be obtained via the LegCo Website (www.legco.gov.hk). Please note that the agenda is subject to change, and the latest information about the agenda could be found on the LegCo Website.

Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings of the meeting from the public galleries of the Chamber of the LegCo Complex. They may reserve seats by calling 3919 3399 during office hours. Members of the public can also watch or listen to the meeting via the "Webcast" system on the LegCo Website.