

Office of The Ombudsman announces results of direct investigation into Transport Department's requirements for physical fitness certification of driving licence applicants/holders (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (November 25) announced the completion of a direct investigation into the requirements for physical fitness certification of driving licence applicants/holders imposed by the Transport Department (TD) and made four recommendations.

The existing legislation provides that driving licence applicants/holders shall declare to the TD whether or not they are suffering from any specified disease or physical disability, or any other disease or physical disability that would be liable to cause their driving of any motor vehicles of the class to which the licence relates to be a source of danger to the public. Moreover, driving licence applicants aged 70 or above must provide a Medical Examination Certificate completed and signed by a registered medical practitioner to the TD at least every three years to confirm that they are medically fit to drive and control any vehicles of the class to which the licence relates.

The investigation by the Office of The Ombudsman has revealed that many jurisdictions have introduced more stringent requirements for physical fitness certification of senior drivers and professional drivers, and even imposed driving restrictions on them to enhance road safety. While driving licence applicants in Hong Kong are subject to certain requirements for physical fitness, the Government has not specified in the Medical Examination Certificate any compulsory items of medical examinations to be performed by medical practitioners for the applicants. Medical practitioners have discretion as to whether the examination items of the applicants and the results will be put in the certificate. Moreover, the existing legislation contains no specific requirements for physical fitness of professional drivers of commercial vehicles.

In view of the ageing population in Hong Kong and the fact that commercial vehicles, especially heavy vehicles, have a greater risk of being involved in traffic accidents and casualties, the Office considered that the TD should keep pace with the times and learn from the experience of other jurisdictions in adjusting the requirements for physical fitness certification of senior drivers and professional drivers, with a view to mitigating the risk of traffic accidents caused by drivers' health problems.

In the investigation report, the Office has made four recommendations to the TD: (1) specify examination items of physical fitness certification for obtaining a driving licence and provide medical professionals with guidelines in this regard; (2) establish a mechanism for medical examinations of commercial vehicle drivers (especially drivers of heavy vehicles) reaching a specified age and impose more stringent requirements for their physical fitness; (3) step up publicity and education to remind drivers to take care of their physical and mental health and to be alert to changes in their capability to drive; and (4) explore ways to facilitate professional drivers of commercial vehicles to undergo medical examinations.

The full investigation report has been uploaded to the website of the Office of The Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.hk for public inspection.

