

Ombudsman probes into Government's regulation of boarding facilities for foreign domestic helpers

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (January 14) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the Government's regulation of boarding facilities for foreign domestic helpers (FDHs).

In late 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been extensive media coverage on FDHs being continuously infected in Hong Kong. An array of problems relating to boarding facilities for FDHs also unfolded, such as over-crowdedness, poor hygiene and suspected violations of building usage, etc. Some media reports brought to light the issue of possible illegal operations, as licensees of FDH employment agencies (or other parties) had allegedly failed to obtain from the Government a relevant licence or waiver before leasing out their premises as FDH boarding facilities.

It was pointed out that as FDHs are permitted to remain in Hong Kong for two weeks upon completion or premature termination of their employment contract, they have a need for boarding facilities during this period of stay in Hong Kong. However, there is currently no specific legislation for regulating FDH boarding facilities, nor have relevant government departments established any mechanisms for inspecting such facilities regarding their compliance with requirements for fire and building safety measures.

Ms Chiu noted, "Since the Government permitted the importation of FDHs into Hong Kong in the 1970s, FDHs have enjoyed statutory rights and have been protected by the Standard Employment Contract prescribed by the Government, including their entitlement to proper accommodation. However, as alleged, many FDH boarding facilities are located in over-crowded commercial or residential buildings. Whether such facilities comply with public safety requirements has aroused much concern. The Government has a duty to ensure a reasonable living environment for FDHs working in Hong Kong as well as public safety. Against this background, I have decided to initiate a direct investigation to examine the regulation of boarding facilities for FDHs by relevant government departments, including the Labour Department, the Home Affairs Department and the Immigration Department, and make recommendations for improvements where warranted."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public, FDHs, concern groups and organisations across sectors to provide information and views on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by February 14, 2021:

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