

Supporting the Family

36. During the consultation exercise conducted in preparation for this Policy Address, many organisations put forward this to me: to effectively deal with a wide spectrum of complicated social problems, the key lies in establishing a family-based support network and forging closer and harmonious relationships among family members. I fully share this view. Social problems are often rooted in different family problems, for example, the lack of proper care and attention for family members, including the elderly, women, youngsters and children. To tackle social problems, it is necessary to start with supporting and strengthening the family: fostering a sense of responsibility and obligation in every family member, nurturing care and love, and developing a relationship of mutual support. Our social welfare measures should strengthen, rather than detract from, the functions of a family. Currently, family-related policies and initiatives cut across the portfolios of different bureaux and departments. We also have separate commissions and various bodies set up specifically to handle issues relating to youth, women and the elderly.

37. To strengthen the functioning of families and provide various family-based support as well as fostering close and harmonious family relationships, we need to think afresh. A proposal worth considering is the setting up of an integrated, holistic and high-level Family Commission responsible for policies and initiatives relating to family support. The Commission would bring under one roof the various commissions and committees currently responsible for handling issues regarding different age groups and genders. It would be able to pool resources, and study and address problems from a cross-policy perspective with a view to achieving more effective co-ordination. Under this Commission, dedicated groups would be set up to oversee specific sectors as need arises from time to time. The Government will seriously study whether we should set up such a Commission and, if so, the re-organisation and resources re-allocation that need to follow. Our primary consideration is whether this new organisation would enhance the effectiveness of implementing our social policy and be conducive to building a harmonious community. The report on the study is expected to be finished by mid-2007. A final decision will be made by the next Administration.

38. The Government will reinforce services provided by the Integrated Family Service Centres. We will continue to devote resources to promote family education. In the years ahead, we will focus on parenting education, providing marriage counselling and advocating parental responsibility. The Women's Commission has been playing an active role in promoting quality parenting. The Government will also promote mutual support among families through our community networks.

39. The nuclear family, comprising a married couple and their unmarried children, is the most common type of family unit in Hong Kong. That said, married couples in general still maintain close and mutually supportive relationships with their parents and siblings, that is, among their extended families. It is common to see married children supporting and taking care of their parents, or for grandparents to help take care of their young grandchildren. Mutual care and support between two generations and among married siblings is a virtue long practised by Chinese families that should be encouraged and promoted. The Government has already adopted a number of policies in support of extended families. For example, under the public housing allocation policy, married offspring are encouraged to live with their parents or in the same housing estate. In addition, our tax regime provides allowances for taxpayers who take care of their dependent parents, grandparents and siblings. We will consider further ways to enhance support for extended families.

40. The Government implemented the first phase of the five-day week initiative on 1 July 2006 in order to improve the quality of family life for staff. I am pleased to note that a number of business corporations have responded positively to the five-day week initiative by adopting this family-friendly measure. The SAR Government will actively work with the business community and NGOs to study ways to promote and deepen various family-friendly measures, such as flexi-time arrangements, job-sharing and working from home.

41. We plan to amend the Domestic Violence Ordinance and complement this initiative with a series of preventive, supportive and specialised services, including an enhanced 24-hour hotline in the Social Welfare Department, a crisis support centre dedicated to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as support services for the family members of victims. We will strengthen the functions of the refuge centres for women, continue to promote the building of community support networks, and reach out to vulnerable families to address their problems at an early stage. We will also continue to provide support for families with disabled members. The Government will enhance the community mental health outreach service, raise the awareness of mental health among family members and provide counselling services to those in need.

42. Building a family-friendly society is an undertaking of the whole community and requires the concerted efforts of the Government and various parties, including the community, neighbourhoods, schools, the business sector, the media, religious organisations and NGOs.

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