



# 油尖旺區議會民選議員陳偉強議員辦事處

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油尖旺區議會第126/2012號文件

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## It is Time to Lift the Elderly out of Abject Poverty

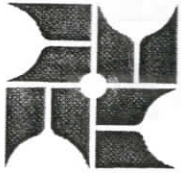
Earlier last week, offering a lunchbox at the price of just HK\$ 4 in celebration of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a Hong Kong's leading fast food chain attracted thousands of senior citizens who soon formed many enthusiastic queues in front of their doors. Upon arrival at its Shek Kip Mei branch as early as 4:00am, some of them were even eager to queue up twice to get one more bargain meals for their spouse.

Having great sympathy for the elderly, I once requested some youngsters to reflect on the causes of the long queues in front of the fast food chain. Unfortunately, they turned me down and retorted: "The old people lined up for the bargained food merely out of greed. Hong Kong comprehensive social security assistance (CSSA) has enabled the disadvantage to live decently. We bet that the pensioners can afford to dine out very often." His callousness and ignorance really left me dumbfounded. Did the senior citizens queue up for so long really just out of greed? I do not think so. The mad scramble for the bargained meal was, in fact, driven by economic hardship.

Our social welfare system has gradually failed to lift the underprivileged out of abject poverty. The reasons are twofold. First, the skyrocketing housing rent means a hand-to-mouth existence to the old public pensioners. The monthly rent of a relatively cozy flat of 400 sq feet in Kowloon could be as high as HK\$ 8,000. But, the amount of the CSSA, including housing allowance, a couple can receive per month is usually less than HK\$ 7,000.

With the aid of this meager public pension, they can only afford to reside in tiny sub-divided flats or filthy cubicles of which the rents are usually HK\$ 3,000 or 4,000. Having eaten up the major part of their pension, the rising rent has made these penniless old people incapable of affording any wholesome food, decent clothing and first-rate medical treatment.

Secondly, most of the Hong Kong elderly, staying with their children, are not entitled to the CSSA. Yet, not necessarily better-off, their children are very often struggling with their parents' expense. According to some academic surveys, the vast majority of the Hong Kong poor are less educated and unskilled immigrants from the mainland. Devoid of permanent citizenship, they are ineligible for public housing.



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More woefully, they, wrongly stigmatized as ill-bred, are always frustrated and dejected in job-hunting. The jobs they can eventually land are usually the worst paid. To my knowledge, in the face of the expensive housing rent and high living cost, these new immigrants have gradually turned to be financially unable to sustain their parents. As a result, more and more old people are entirely depending on their Old Age Allowance of just around HK\$ 1100 per month for their survival. It is no wonder that they are so desperate for bargain food.

Aware of the elderly misery, the C. Y. Leung Administration has attempted to help these impoverished senior citizens and revived the Committee on Poverty to define the poverty line. More importantly, Leung has proposed a special elderly allowance of HK\$ 2,200 and expected the Legislative Council to approve his plan as soon as possible.

Undeniably, this public benefit, although mean-tested, will indeed alleviate the elderly poverty in the near future. However, having a distaste for the mean-tested nature of the special allowance, some lawmakers have argued against Leung's proposal. A few of them have even revealed that they will also employ filibustering tactic to vote it down in the Legislative Council.

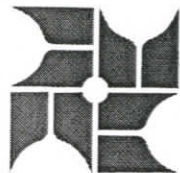
## Conclusion

In my view, whether or not this new public benefit should be mean-tested is open to debate in the chamber. But, delaying or shelving such an important and urgent proposal on the special allowance will do a great disservice to the needy.

More importantly, I strongly demand that the Social welfare department review whether or not the amount of CSSA housing allowance can catch up with the skyrocketing housing rent in Hong Kong.

This paper is being submitted to the District Council meeting of 25 October 2012 for discussion. May I also invite the representatives of Labour and Welfare Bureau and Social Welfare Department to participate in our discussion during the meeting? Written replies to this paper from the bureaus and departments are also desirable and appreciated.

Chan Wai-keung,  
Yau Tsim Mong district councillor



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文件中文譯本  
(此文件一切以英文版作準)  
**關注長者貧窮問題**

香港人口日益老化，而貧困長者為數不少，其中許多長者單靠綜援金或千多元的生果金過活。無奈現時樓價高企，引致房屋租金屢創新高。九龍區的劏房月租已界乎 3000 至 4000 元，而社會福利署提供給單身人士家庭的房屋租金津貼最高為 1335 元。非公屋住戶單身長者靠租金津貼及綜援金，生活根本無以為繼。與子女同住的長者情況亦差不多。他們不能申請綜援金，若子女收入不豐，未能提供額外的金錢以作開銷，每月的衣、食、行只能靠 1100 元的生果金來解決。

建議：

政府應盡快檢討房屋租金津貼的政策，提高津貼金額以追上暴漲的房屋租金。

文件提呈：

本文件將於 2012 年 10 月 25 日舉行之油尖旺區議會會議上供全體議員討論，並要求勞工及福利局、社會福利署代表出席上述會議，並作出回應。