

LegCo Question No. 11
(Written reply)

Asked by: Hon Abraham SHEK

Date of Sitting: 11 July 2007

Replied by: Secretary for
Constitutional and Mainland
Affairs

Questions

It has been reported that there was a tremendous increase in the number of cases of pregnancy discrimination in employment last year. Rather than being dismissed, pregnant employees were advised to resign or forced to resign by being transferred to work in a poor environment or given extra workload. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

- (a) it knows the total number of complaints of alleged pregnancy discrimination received by the authorities concerned from January 2006 to May 2007;
- (b) it will consider raising the penalty for breaching the relevant legislation in order to enhance the deterrent effect against pregnancy discrimination; and
- (c) the authorities concerned will step up public education concerning pregnancy discrimination and alleged discriminatory acts?

Reply

Madam President,

- (a) According to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) which is responsible for investigating complaints of alleged pregnancy discrimination, 167 of such complaints were received during the period from January 2006 to May 2007 (with 115 complaints in

2006 and 52 complaints in the first five months of 2007).

- (b) Under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance, the remedies for victims of discrimination are mainly civil in nature. Hence, the question of increasing the statutory penalties under these Ordinances as a deterrent against pregnancy discrimination does not arise.
- (c) The EOC has been taking proactive steps in promoting public awareness against discrimination, including discrimination on the ground of pregnancy discrimination. Since January 2006, it has produced a television drama-documentary, staged drama performances and published a number of articles in newspapers and in the EOC's own newsletter. These drama productions and written articles all focused specifically on pregnancy discrimination. During the same period, it has also organized a total of 230 workshops and briefings for various organizations on subjects relating to the existing anti-discrimination ordinances. Where appropriate, the themes of some of these workshops and briefings also cover pregnancy discrimination. The EOC will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach in eliminating pregnancy discrimination through education and promotion, complaints investigation and conciliation, and providing legal assistance if necessary.