

**Social Welfare Department**

8/F, Wu Chung House  
213 Queen's Road East  
Wanchai

26 February 2020

Attn. Ms. Aegean Chan

Dear Ms. Chan,

**Ref. Request for an urgent increase in assistance**

The Refugee Union is deeply concerned about the ongoing suffering of our community that depends exclusively on the inadequate assistance provided by Hong Kong Government, particularly because we are prohibited from working under penalty of 15 months in prison.

The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic aggravated our predicament by emptying shelves of essential items in the only supermarkets (Park'n'Shop group) where we are permitted to shop with prepaid cards. It should be noted that a lack of cash excludes refugees from shopping at other stores and purchasing masks to protect against the virus.

Further, the current assistance – adjusted six years ago in January 2014 – has fallen far behind inflation as well as the realistic daily needs of our community. The present package fails to meet our most basic expenses for accommodation, utilities, food, clothing, hygiene products (including diapers) and transportation costs.

The Refugee Union respectfully requests your intervention to:

1. Increase the housing allowance;
2. Increase the utility allowance;
3. Increase the food allowance;
4. Provide a clothing allowance;
5. Disburse the food allowance in cash;
6. Allow the purchase of all basic food items (some chicken/fish is not allowed);
7. Cancel the substandard toiletry bags which are a waste of tax-dollars;
8. Replace the toiletry bags with a cash allowance;
9. Increase the transport allowance for adults;
10. Increase the transport allowance for school children.

Before you consider the standard cut-and-paste reply (*i.e. the objective of the assistance is to ensure claimants are not destitute ... it is not intended to provide more than basic needs so as to avoid a magnet effect ... extra needs should be submitted to ISS-HK ... etc.*), we invite you to step into our shoes with empathic professionalism and recommend a practical strategy to bring these demands to the government departments that may change the welfare policies affecting our community.

Finally, it is important to note that in this viral pandemic, an increase in assistance would in no way constitute a “*magnet effect*” because new refugees are unlikely to seek asylum in Hong Kong, while those who can leave have already left and those who remain clearly have no relocation option.

We look forward to collaborating with you to resolve these problems.

Sincerely Yours,



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Refugee Union