

LCQ13: Underage family members of racehorse owners entering racecourses at race meetings

Following is a question by the Hon Bernard Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 17):

Question:

Starting from the current racing season, the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) allows the underage family members of racehorse owners to enter racecourses at race meetings to watch horse racing from a close distance at designated boxes, and to join the phototaking with the winning horses at the turf. Some organisations have expressed concern about this arrangement, worrying that it might encourage children and young people to take part in gambling. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it has assessed if such an arrangement goes against its established policy of preventing underage gambling;
- (b) whether it knows if HKJC plans to extend such an arrangement to the underage family members of other HKJC members and spectators at the Public Enclosure; and
- (c) how it will step up efforts to prevent access of children and young people to betting facilities under the new arrangement?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) & (c) According to the information provided by the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) to the Government, the new arrangement is in response to the request from the horse owners, and is applicable only to day meetings at the Sha Tin racecourse and the under-aged family members brought along by the horse owners. Access for the under-aged persons to the racecourse is confined to the specified non-betting areas. The HKJC has already put in place various measures and arrangements (including an increase in manpower) to ensure clear separation of such areas from the betting halls, and to strictly guard against entrance of the under-aged persons to the betting halls. We will closely monitor the implementation of the new arrangement, and will request the HKJC to provide information on the implementation to the Betting and Lotteries Commission. So far, there is no information to suggest that under-aged betting has taken place inside the racecourse because of a failure of such measures.

(b) The Government is not aware of any concrete plans by the HKJC to expand such arrangement at this stage.

Ends/Wednesday, October 17, 2007