

LCQ16: Provision of religious food

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Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee Wai-king and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Ms Florence Hui Hiu-fai, in the Legislative Council today (July 14):

Question:

The Islamic and Hindu restrictions on diet are religious rules which their followers must observe. The food they eat and even the food handling process (including butchery) must comply with such religious rules (e.g. Hinduism tries to minimise as far as possible the pain and torture suffered by livestock during butchery, while Islam also regulates how livestock is slaughtered for consumption by Muslims). Regarding the provision of food conforming to religious rules to the aforesaid religious followers by schools, hospitals and penal institutions, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the current number of penal institutions which provide such food; the number of complaints they received in the past five years about failure to provide such food, as well as the follow-up actions and outcome;
- (b) whether it knows the current number of schools and hospitals which provide food to the aforesaid religious followers that conforms to their religious rules; the number of complaints they received in the past five years about failure to provide such food, as well as the follow-up actions and outcome;
- (c) whether the Government will consider issuing guidelines to the aforesaid institutions to remind them of the need to respect different religions and try to provide religious followers with food conforming to their religious rules as far as possible; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (d) whether the authorities have plans to promote the provision of food conforming to religious rules for religious followers by the aforesaid institutions, so as to create an accommodating atmosphere embracing all religions; if they have such plans, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) All 29 correctional facilities under the Correctional Services Department (CSD) provide four main dietary scales for inmates' choice having regard to their health conditions, dietary habits and religious needs. The Dietary Scale 2 does not include pork or beef, and the lamb and chicken used are supplied and prepared by eligible contractors according to the requirements of the religions concerned. In the past five years, CSD did not receive any complaint about the failure to provide food conforming to religious rules.

(b) The Education Bureau (EDB) does not have any statistics on the number of schools providing food that meets the dietary requirements of various religion believers.

At present, apart from ordinary meals, the 39 public hospitals under the Hospital Authority (HA) also provide patients in need with vegetarian food. In addition, 17 hospitals of HA also provide Halal food.

According to the record, in the past five years, EDB and HA have not received any complaints against the aforesaid institutions for failing to provide food to religious followers that conforms to their religious rules.

(c) and (d) CSD respects the religious beliefs of inmates and has established guidelines on the provision of suitable meals to meet their needs as far as possible.

EDB issued an EDB Circular in November 2008 reminding all education establishments of the responsibilities to make their best endeavours in supporting the teaching and learning of all their students irrespective of race, in accommodating ethnic diversity in schools, and in respecting cultural and religious differences. Also, EDB has all long worked closely with the Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Department on advising schools through circulars and guidelines to formulate policies and measures on healthy and green meals. Schools are requested to involve parents in the process of selecting lunch suppliers, including developing lunch requirements, selection criteria and marking scheme, etc. Generally speaking, parents may take the initiative to reflect the needs of their children for special dietary arrangements, including requirements related to their religion, to the school. Schools may develop school-based lunch requirements and criteria for selecting lunch suppliers having regard to their own circumstances with a view to providing meals that meet the personal health and other needs of their students.

HA will provide service according to patients' need as far as practicable. HA plans to extend the provision of Halal food to all its hospitals within this year.

Ends/Wednesday, July 14, 2010

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