

LCQ14: Student Service Vehicles

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng, at the Legislative Council meeting today (January 12):

Question:

From time to time in recent years, there have been cases in which students or persons with intellectual disability (ID) were left inside school buses or coaches. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of reported cases that the authorities had received in the past five years on suspected violation of the Guidelines for Ensuring Safety of Students on Student Service Vehicles (the Guidelines) issued by the Transport Department (TD) and, among these cases, the number of substantiated cases; how these reported cases have been followed up and the results;

(b) given that the Guidelines are at present of an advisory nature and do not require schools to report cases of suspected violation of the Guidelines, whether the authorities will consider further refining the Guidelines, including requiring schools to report cases of suspected violation of the Guidelines and even rendering the Guidelines to have legal effect; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) of the number of cases the authorities had received in the past five years that involved persons with ID being left inside coaches; whether the authorities have any mechanism in place to follow up such cases; if they have, of the details of the follow-up results; if not, the reasons for that, and how the authorities prevent the recurrence of similar incidents; and

(d) whether the authorities will consider organising training courses through TD or training institutes, and requiring drivers and escorts of school buses and coaches to attend such courses, so as to raise their safety awareness; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) and (b) In operating student transport services (STS), operators and drivers must comply with the relevant provisions/requirements under the Public Bus Services Ordinance (Cap 230), the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap 374) and the Passenger Service Licence (PSL) conditions. The authorities will institute prosecution or proceedings against any persons found violating statutory requirements or PSL conditions.

The Transport Department (TD) has compiled the Guidelines for Ensuring Safety of Students on Student Service Vehicles (the Guidelines) to serve as a concise code of practice and user guide for service providers (including operators, drivers and escorts) and users (including schools, parents/guardians and students) of STS to facilitate effective operation of such services by the service providers. The TD has been monitoring the operation and performance of the STS providers. The TD will immediately write to the STS provider concerned to urge for compliance of the Guidelines once violation of the Guidelines is noticed. For instance, in respect of an incident in which a child was left inside a school bus in October last year, TD wrote to the concerned STS provider to request for its compliance with the Guidelines.

The TD reviews the Guidelines at the end of every academic year, taking into consideration actual operational experiences and road traffic situation. The Education Bureau (EDB) is consulted to ensure that the Guidelines can address the issues and concerns raised by schools and parents. Before the start of each academic year, the TD distributes the latest Guidelines to all PSL holders who provide STS and reminds them to comply with the Guidelines at all times. From time to time, the TD, through such channels as regular meetings with the student service vehicles (SSV) trade and periodical issue of a bulletin for the non-franchised bus trade, calls on trade members to comply with the Guidelines in providing STS. As observed by the TD, STS users and providers at large accept and follow the existing regulatory arrangements on STS. The TD does not have statistics on cases of suspected violation of the Guidelines. The TD will keep a close watch on the operation of STS and review the related arrangements when necessary.

(c) and (d) On receiving a report of case of persons being left or trapped inside vehicles, the Police will send police officers to the scene as soon as possible to

understand the situation and, if necessary, immediately call for fire services and ambulance personnel for on-the-spot assistance. The Police will conduct follow-up investigation depending on the individual circumstances of the cases. Should any offences be committed, prosecution will be initiated. The Police do not have statistics on cases involving persons with intellectual disability being left inside coaches.

All along, the Government has been enhancing safety awareness of drivers and instilling in them proper driving attitudes through professional training, education and publicity. The relevant measures are as follows:

On professional training, the TD introduces driver improvement courses to instill a stronger sense of road safety and a better understanding of good driving behaviour. Separately, the Government has also introduced legislative amendments to the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap 374) and the Road Traffic (Driving Offence-Points) Ordinance (Cap 375) to require traffic offenders who have accumulated 10 or more driving offence points within a period of two years, or persons convicted of serious traffic offences to attend driving improvement courses on a mandatory basis. In addition, the TD encourages drivers and escorts to attend courses on SSV, road safety and driving improvement under the Skill Upgrading Scheme jointly organised by the Labour and Welfare Bureau and various training institutes. The courses mainly aim at improving driving attitudes and assisting operators to enhance the quality of STS. A 70% fee subsidy is provided to attendants to these courses by the Government.

On publicity and education, the TD will arrange SSV drivers to attend safety seminars, talks, workshops and exhibitions to update their knowledge on the latest road safety requirements, new legislation relating to traffic offences and road safety, and occupational health information. Moreover, every year the Police launch a territory-wide campaign to promote SSV safety. Regional Road Safety Teams distribute promotional leaflets in various districts to remind SSV drivers, teachers and parents of student transport safety. Representatives from the Police also give talks in schools to educate students on safety precautions when travelling on SSVs.

The TD will continue to introduce appropriate measures as circumstances so warrant to promote stronger safety awareness among professional drivers.

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