

Submitting stakeholder: Federation of New Territories Youth (Hong Kong)

The Federation of New Territories Youth was established in June 1997, a momentous period that marked Hong Kong's return to its motherland. Our mission is to "foster a sense of patriotism among the youth towards China while promoting their active participation in community affairs." The federation offers a wide range of social services for young people, designed to awaken their potential. Meanwhile, we encourage them to participate in exchange programs with the mainland to deepen their bond with the motherland, and guide them to engage in social activities that contribute positively towards the development and stability of society.

Since its inception, the federation has grown from the original 12 group members to 19 affiliate clubs today, covering all regions of the New Territories of Hong Kong. The increased professionalism and the range of activities within these clubs have attracted more members. The federation has expanded from its initial 1,698 members to over 8,000 today, making it one of Hong Kong's most influential and large-scale social organizations.

Young people, as the future pillars of society, are the driving force behind our service expansion. We actively encourage members to participate in a variety of training programs with a goal to enhance their professional knowledge, improve their work capabilities, and raise the quality of their social service contributions.

Title: Improving governance at the district level – 2023

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《Improving governance at the district level – 2023》

1. In May of this year, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government introduced proposals for "improving governance at the district level". The goal is to realign the District Council ("DC") with its rightful roles as explicitly outlined in the Basic Law, and to enhance its governance capabilities at the local level. Furthermore, this initiative could strengthen the community service functions of the DC, ultimately providing benefits to the public.

2. It is widely recognized that the current DC has deviated significantly from its designated role as a non-political power district organization, as defined in Article 97 of the Basic Law. Disturbingly, certain DC members have exploited this platform to engage in actions that jeopardize national security. These actions include advocating for "Hong Kong independence", inciting violence, deliberately obstructing government administration, provoke social conflict, neglecting public welfare, and damaging citizens' well-being. Furthermore, a considerable number of former DC members have tendered their resignations under various pretexts, refusing to swear allegiance to the Basic Law. These behaviours are categorically unacceptable and require immediate redress.

3. In response to the aforementioned issues, the HKSAR government introduced the District Councils (Amendment) Bill 2023 ("the bill") to the Hong Kong Legislative Council for legislation in June. The bill proposes substantial adjustments to reform the structure of the DC, including: enhancing the consultative and service functions of the DC, enabling each local "Home Affairs Department" Officer to act as chairperson of the DC and equipping them with the authority to aid the work of the DC, refining the composition of the DC and clarifying the method for its formation, and establishing a qualification review mechanism. Furthermore, the bill also introduces a system to monitor the performance of the DC members, scrutinize those who fail to meet public expectations, and take suitable action based on the severity of their misconducts. In the following section, I will provide a summary of these key points.

4. The bill specifies that the DC should gather citizen opinions within the district on topics determined by the chairperson, and then submit summaries of recommendations and proposed response plans to the HKSAR government. This initiative not only realigns the DC with its positioning and direction as outlined in the Basic Law, but it also establishes pathways for wider public opinion under an effective mechanism, thereby facilitating the enhancement of governmental administrative efficiency. Concurrently, the bill stipulates that the DC should support and assist in the promotion of laws and government policies, and aid the government in conducting a range of consultations, publicity, and liaison activities. In essence, beyond soliciting public opinion, DC also bears the responsibility to guide public sentiment on laws and policies implemented by the government, assist various societal sectors in understanding policy intentions, and further strengthen the consultative functions of the DC.

5. The bill introduces significant reforms to the composition of the DC. The new structure will comprise appointed DC members, elected representatives from district committees, and a segment of directly elected council members. Such a composition strategy could attract individuals from various social stratification and industries to participate in the DC, reflecting the diversity of democracy in the HKSAR. This approach could also expand the social and political base of HKSAR's governance, enhancing district's governance efficiency and community harmony. Additionally, to uphold the principle of "patriots governing Hong Kong", the bill proposes the formation of a "Candidate Eligibility Review Committee". This committee will assess whether the aforementioned individuals meet the legal prerequisites and conditions for upholding the Basic Law. These provisions not only help to further protect national security and prevent individuals with hidden agendas from exploiting the district council platform for anti-China and chaos stirring activities, but also ensure the full realization of the principle of "patriots governing Hong Kong." This, in turn, enhances the governance efficiency of the DC. The DC's full adherence to the "patriots governing Hong Kong" principle will serve as a crucial guarantee for the stability and harmony of HKSAR society.

6. In relation to youth development, the relevant bureaus of the HKSAR government have expressed their intention to incorporate more patriotic youth into the DC. This approach

serves dual purposes: on one hand, it provides a platform for nurturing future political talents by offering them practical political experience at the district level; on the other hand, it enables the council to actively collaborate with the two government-established district youth committees — the District Youth Community Building Committee and the District Youth Development and Civic Education Committee. Jointly hosting a variety of public service activities, these collaborative efforts aim to foster positive thinking among young people, deepen their understanding of national development, and stimulate their active involvement in the Greater Bay Area's development.

7. In his important speech on July 1 of the previous year, Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted four expectations, one of which urged the HKSAR government to improve its governance and effectively ease the daily life challenges faced by the public. As a result, once the bill is fully implemented, the DC can legitimately become a platform that is attentive to public needs and is dedicated to serving citizens. At the same time, the council can work in unison with established district committees and care teams, share resources and information, and strengthen its advisory and service roles. This approach allows the public to truly perceive the direct benefits and positive impact from proposals for "improving governance at the district level".

8. The District Council (Amendment) Bill 2023 is a transformative piece of legislation with substantial implications for the advancement of the district council system in Hong Kong. It is designed to empower DC to function as effective conduit between the government and the public, ensuring that they continue to prioritize local affairs and public services.

9. The proposed amendments put forth in the bill primarily aim to strengthen the consultative and service functions of the DC. By doing so, the councils will be equipped to more effectively collate and express public sentiment on local issues. This enhancement of public engagement will, in turn, contribute to the administrative efficiency of the government and the overall governance of the Special Administrative Region (SAR).

10. In addition to these functional improvements, the bill also proposes alterations to the composition of the DC. This will lead to a system that is more representative of the diversity within the HKSAR. The inclusion of appointed DC members, elected representatives from local committees, and a proportion of directly elected DC members, ensures a broad spectrum of perspectives within the councils, expanding their social and political base.

11. To uphold the integrity of the DC, the bill proposes the establishment of a "Candidate Eligibility Review Committee". This committee is responsible for verifying that those serving on the DC are patriots who are willing to uphold the Basic Law. This essential step aids in protecting national security and curbing the potential for individuals with hidden disruptive intentions to infiltrate the council.

12. The relevant bureaus of the HKSAR government also expresses the importance of youth involvement in the DC. By engaging young people who are patriotic and care about Hong Kong, we can foster future stability and prosperity in the SAR. The DC can serve as an invaluable platform for the youth to gain an understanding of national development and to integrate themselves into the larger national development narrative.

13. In conclusion, the proposals for "improving governance at the district level" encapsulated in the District Council (Amendment) Bill 2023 have the potential to significantly elevate the effectiveness and efficiency of Hong Kong's district council system. By implementing these changes, we can ensure that the DC remain focused on their core mandate of addressing local affairs and providing public services. At the same time, it strengthens the stability and prosperity of the SAR, fostering a deeper sense of unity and cooperation among its diverse population.