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Accused department to help widow meet funeral costs

JO PEGG

The funeral for a man found hanged on Sunday will be subsidised by the government department his widow blames for driving him to commit suicide.

Social Welfare Department officers were last night talking to the widow of Lam Shek-keung, 52, who killed himself after more than two years of wrangling over money he said the department owed him.

Acting Deputy Director (Services) Eliza Leung Wong Kwok-shing said up to \$11,000 would be offered to help cover the cost of burying the father of three.

She regretted Lam's death but said the department had been fair in dealing with his pleas for money to fund renovations at the home for the elderly that he operated. Lam's son, 15, found him hanging in the family's Tai Po public housing home on Sunday. He had left a note saying he owed family and friends too much money and would repay them in the next life.

His widow, 40, said Lam had been upset by the department's refusal to give him the \$1.8 million subsidy he had sought.

Lam had run the Wan Luen Home for the Elderly, a private centre now based in Shamshuipo, since 1993.

Mrs Leung said Lam's dispute was over money offered to help owners upgrade homes for the elderly to comply with safety laws introduced in 1995.

The department would help cover the cost of, say, the fire alarm installations and gas appliances.

Lam had borrowed the \$3 million he spent on renovations from relatives and friends. He had asked the department to pay \$1.8 million.



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If we granted him extra, it would be unfair to others

Mrs Leung said he was only entitled to \$490,000 for essential work and had been told this many times. He had been "fixated" over getting the entire amount.

Under the subsidy scheme, 118 owners had been given between \$4,500 and \$390,000. A total of \$10.85 million has been spent.

"If we granted him extra, it would be unfair to others," Mrs Leung said.

"I have to be fair and transparent and just . . . it cannot be done on a personal basis."



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