

Self
Eggs
Old people
Kxbo

\$4m cost delaying law for elderly

By CLIFFORD LO

CONTROLS on private homes for the aged are being delayed because the Government is reluctant to spend \$4 million a year on a licensing system.

The Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Bill was approved by the Executive Council shortly after the firebombing of a home in Kowloon last June. Two elderly women were killed in the incident.

The bill was introduced to the Legislative Council in November.

But legislators have for six months failed to agree with the Government on whether operators of the homes should pay the cost of licensing.

The chairman of the Legco committee on the bill, Hui Yin-fat, said the main barrier to the law was the Government's refusal to shoulder all expenditure.

Under the bill, operators would be held responsible for the cost of licensing, but last month the Government backed down and promised to pay 75 per cent with the remainder borne by the operators, he said.

"The Government insists that the private aged homes are profit-making organisations and that they should not be entitled to a subsidy," Mr Hui said.

A total of \$4 million a year would be needed to inspect and supervise the elderly homes.

Mr Hui said: "It is a kind of service for the elderly and the private homes for the elderly do have a welfare element. Therefore, the Government should pay, not the operators."

Colleague Zachary Wong Wai-yin said: "The operators have noted that if the Government charges them, they would pass the cost on to their clients. In the end, the old people or their families would suffer."

Director of the Society for Community Organisations, Ho Hei-wah, said: "It is unfair for the old people to suffer because the Government refuses to pay."

"At present, the Government fails to provide sufficient places for the elderly. The private aged homes play a key role in helping society and providing services for old people."

Legislators will hold a meeting with officials on Tuesday to discuss the bill.

Mr Hui hopes the bill will be passed in the next Legco session.

There are more than 400 private homes catering for about 17,000 elderly people.

The bill would cover any premises where six or more people aged 60 and above are looked after.

Mr Hui, who is also director of Hong Kong Council of Social Services, said three main provisions under the bill were safeguards against fire hazards, more space for residents of homes, and staff training.

A grace period of up to three years would be granted to meet requirements after the regulation came into effect, he said.