

**PathFinders Limited**  
**Oral Submission to**  
**The Hong Kong SAR Legislative Council’s Subcommittee on Children’s Rights**  
**On ‘Rights of Children Affected by Domestic Violence’**  
**23 January 2018**

Good morning Chairman and Committee Members

My name is Siti Octrina Malikhah. I am a case manager at PathFinders, a Hong Kong charity.

We are frustrated that we are here yet again to discuss children subjected to domestic violence. Nothing has changed since we spoke here two years ago in response to the tragic case of Yeung Chi-wai. At that time, we made recommendations for improvements to the welfare system.

That system is still failing our children, as highlighted by the most recent spate of highly-publicised child abuse cases.

Here is the photo of a 3-year old boy who was badly burned when his father poured boiling water on him.

This little boy was left untreated for over a week while his mother covered up for her abusive boyfriend, the child’s father. At the time, the mother and two sons were living in a shelter, the mother having already left the family home.

In a situation where the mother was also a victim of the boyfriend’s abuse, she was simply not able to act in the best interests of her son. Despite being in a government-subsidised shelter, there was no mechanism to ensure that this badly injured child was healthy and safe. The mother came to PathFinders in desperation after the father had strangled her with cable ties and severely beaten her. It was then that the little child’s burns were discovered and he was immediately taken to hospital.

We repeat and emphasise the recommendations that we have made in our previous submissions to LegCo:

1. While PathFinders agrees in principle that children are best brought up within their own family, it should be acknowledged that parents do not always act in the best interests of their child. The assumption that the family is the best place for a child and the protection this affords abusing parents, can and does put children at risk;

2. There should be a specialised, collaborative, cross-services child protection unit able to speak for every child in Hong Kong, regardless of the child's immigration status and at every point of contact be it at school or when accessing welfare, education, medical and legal services;
3. The amount and quality of training given to all those working in the child protection arena needs to be substantially increased and amplified;
4. The Social Welfare Department should be responsible for following up on all cases where there is concern about the welfare of a child, however minor and even when the caregiver refuses to engage. SWD must be given the vision, authority and resources to intervene and to be accountable when the system fails;
5. The Official Solicitor's powers to represent children in child protection cases should be enhanced, communicated, resourced and properly engaged; and
6. Critically, the children themselves need to be educated about who to contact confidentially when something is wrong. Ideally there should be a hotline, SMS and social media options. Childline in the UK is an excellent example of this.

This little boy I am speaking about is only one of the cases we see at PathFinders. We really hope that more can be done to prevent any other children from suffering in this way.

Thank you