



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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Companies must pay for Covid-19 screening

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) finds it shocking that the Social Security Organisation (Socso) had agreed to bear Covid-19 screening fee for all employees who had to work during the current Movement Control Order (MCO).

The International Trade and Industry (Miti) Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali had recently announced that employees from companies permitted to operate during the Movement Control Order (MCO) had to undergo the mandatory Covid-19 screening.

While we welcome the mandatory Covid-19 screening, the cost of it must be borne by their employers because the employees are taking risks in going to work during the MCO for the benefit of the employers. Moreover, the employees should be paid a risk allowance. A close monitoring system has to be implemented to ensure that the preventive measures against Covid-19 infection at the employees' workplace are strictly adhered to.

It is a horrible idea of using Socso to fund the Covid-19 screening fees because Socso is supposed to provide a 'safety net' in the event of workplace injuries, emergencies, occupational diseases, and death of the contributor. Nobody knows what is beyond the current Covid-19 horizon and for Socso to spend employees' fund on such screening without their consent is both unethical and unwise.

Let us remind the government that Socso belongs and is accountable to about 7 million active employees (as in 2017). By arbitrarily utilising the fund of about 7 million active contributors nationwide should raise eyebrows as such decision is not justifiable. It does not make sense for employees be made to pay for their own Covid-19 screening and go to work during MCO, thereby increasing their risk of exposure to the virus.

Employees should be given a risk allowance if they are required to work during MCO because they expose themselves to an element of health risk by doing so. Risk allowance is a feature in work benefits in many countries and was proposed in Malaysia in 2013. It was, however, a stillbirth; given the current situation, it is important for the government to introduce the allowance because employees are compelled to work under circumstances of extraordinary risk.

The government should also introduce a hotline for anonymous whistle-blowers who want to report about their workplace compliance failure to Miti's Health and Safety Protocols (HSP). There were 2,732 companies approved for operation in late March and the number should have increased significantly by now and it is difficult for Miti to monitor the implementation of HSP nationwide.

We want to reiterate that Socso should not bear the Covid-19 screening cost, that employees who need to work during MCO should be entitled to a risk allowance, and there must be a channel for whistle-blowing on the failure of companies to execute Miti's HSP.

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