

Protecting David from Goliath

I congratulate the Law Society's Ambrose Lam San-keung for helping draft such strong legislation which has actually got the attention of the Real Estate Developers Association ("Developers turn against law to regulate flat sales", February 1).

REDA's reference to the release of pricing information three days prior to a sale as "unlawful infringement of the owner's rights" to use or dispose of flats" is irrational to say the least. Is REDA inferring that a ban on inflating of gross floor area is an infringement of "freedom of expression"? If this is the case, it shows just how far REDA will go to prevent fair and clear communication between developer and buyer, and demonstrates the need for such legislation.

This law is nothing more than a piece of legislation designed to keep the big guy (developers) honest in order to offer protection for the little guy (buyers). Is that too much to ask? REDA says that the legislation "would not survive a constitutional challenge apart from the objective to protect buyers". This is exactly why this legislation is needed, to protect buyers from those developers who see a need to misrepresent. Is this not what government is supposed to do, protect the Davids from the Goliaths?

Democrat legislator Lee Wing-tat, recognising REDA's new approach as "far from rational", demonstrates his ability to represent the people on such an important basic issue - clear communication between buyer and seller.

Perhaps the real reason REDA is so upset is that the proposed maximum penalty of seven years' jail and a HK\$5 million fine is not just a slap on the hand but has actual teeth, as it should.

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to the public, especially in congested Hong Kong.

Our centre's research shows that the number of railway injuries were reduced by 67.5 per cent for suicide and some 70 per cent for accidents between the pre and post screen-door installation period, 1997-2001 and 2003-2007 respectively. There is no obvious substitute.

We agree that simply restricting that availability has limited effect on suicidal thoughts but a delay in accessing the means of suicide provides a wider window of opportunity for intervention.

Moreover, the presence of these doors may even alter people's perception about the desirability of railway suicide.

Also, incidents on the tracks can have a ripple effect. They can cause severe psychological trauma to the train driver and the many bystanders who have witnessed the incident.

In addition, there would be disruptions to that route for several hours which would have implications for large parts of the railway network.

Therefore, despite the high installation cost of platform screen doors, our study has shown it is still cost-effective, based on the World Health Organisation standard and from a larger societal perspective in which the interests of victims, railway operators and passengers are taken into consideration.

How much we care for the vulnerable is a reflection of the core values of a civilised society. We must also increase community awareness of the urgent need for suicide prevention. It is unfortunate that the MTR Corporation is delaying installing doors on the East Rail and Ma On Shan lines until the early 2020s.

The centre estimates that over the next 10 years, assuming the epidemiological pattern on railway injury remains unchanged, there will be 30 suicides, 40 suicide attempts, 52 accidents, 700 years of disability life years and 18,000 minutes of service time will be lost.

Paul Yip, director, Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention