

The Lives, Health, and Public Opinions of the Kinmen & Matsu Residents: Do They Not Count?

Explanation of why the “Lunar New Year Charter Ferry Program for Kinmen and Matsu” does not include transfers for mainland China-based Taiwanese citizens

MAC Press Release No. 033

Since the Lunar New Year Charter Ferry Program for Kinmen and Matsu (hereinafter the “Charter Ferry Program”) was announced on December 22, it has come under malicious criticism by certain politicians, media channels, and political commentators, who accused the government of making political calculation for not permitting “transfers” in the program. Such argument is a flagrant misinterpretation of the government's policy intentions, to which the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) expressed deep regret and issued the following press release for a five-point clarification.

1. Mainland China has been experiencing a rapidly worsening COVID-19 situation since abandoning its dynamic zero-COVID policy. Experts forecast that the number of COVID-19 infections in mainland China will peak around the Lunar New Year holiday and warned of a wider spread of the pandemic given that the dominant virus strain in mainland China is unique from that in Taiwan. Countries around the world have been on high alert; for instance, on December 16, South Korea listed China as a "key country for quarantine and health inspection."

2. The “Charter Ferry Program” serves as a middle ground between ensuring disease prevention and facilitating homecoming travel. The fact that transfers via the Mini-three-links are not permitted in the present program for Taiwanese

citizens based in mainland China is due to concerns for the overwhelming risks of COVID-19 transmission.

(1) The mechanism of transfers by mainland China-based Taiwanese citizens is as follows: The travelers board a ferry to Kinmen or Matsu and arrive at one of the Mini-three-links ports; they then catch a ride to the Kinmen Shangyi Airport or Matsu Airport for a flight to Taiwan proper. It is clear that transfers under this mechanism are different from transferring within an airport in the common sense.

(2) Once Taiwanese citizens arrive in Kinmen, since they are not immediately connected to the flight for Taiwan proper, they may linger for souvenir-shopping or visiting friends and relatives.

(3) During the Lunar New Year holiday, Taiwanese citizens risk being stranded in Kinmen due to delay or cancellation of the flight owing to weather conditions, mechanical issues, etc.

(4) Kinmen and Matsu have limited medical capacity, with only one hospital each. Kinmen has four negative pressure isolation beds (Matsu has two), 10 intensive care unit beds (Matsu has one), and currently 23 available dedicated hospital beds (Matsu has none). Should a large number of Taiwanese citizens are stranded in Kinmen, it could impact the local healthcare system and crowd out the Kinmen and Matsu residents' rights to and opportunities for medical treatment.

(5) Based on the field studies and a comprehensive assessment by the Ministry of Health and Welfare about how to ensure proper COVID-19 prevention work, a more feasible solution at the moment is to restrict access to the "Charter Ferry Program" to only the residents of Kinmen and Matsu.

3. Considering the severity of the COVID-19 situation in mainland China, both the government and general public in Kinmen and Matsu hope that the government

would prioritize providing convenience for Kinmen and Matsu residents and facilitating humanitarian travel premised on the pandemic being kept under control, whereas transfers are not to be greenlighted yet. This is for the sake of preventing the pandemic from growing out of control.

4. The government constructed this program based on a comprehensive assessment of various factors, including suggestions from the leaders, legislators, and the public of Kinmen and Matsu. The MAC is deeply saddened by and regrets the truth-defying claims, irresponsible distortion, and vicious criticism of government policies by certain politicians, media channels, and political commentators seeking to sow division among the people. The Kinmen and Matsu residents are also Taiwanese citizens. The MAC kindly asked that the involved parties listen to their moral conscience and not further exacerbate the risks of the pandemic for Kinmen and Matsu residents; we should value their lives and health and avoid escalating the threat of the pandemic for Taiwan.

5. The MAC reiterated that the present program serves only as the starting point for the resumption of not only the Mini-three-links passenger service but of orderly post-pandemic cross-Strait exchanges. In a step-by-step approach, the government pledges more efforts, to resume passenger service under the Mini-three-links and other direct sea and air transportation. The MAC called on the Taiwan society to show understanding for each other, as the utmost priority at this time is for the government to implement the “Charter Ferry Program” so as to lay a firm foundation for future expansion of cross-Strait exchanges.