

Elderly and exploited

Low-wage workers often subjected to unreasonable rules

Letter from Arthur Lim

I READ with sympathy the letter from Ms Jessie Chong about her father's experience upon landing a job as a cleaner ("Clean up treatment of cleaners", Oct 19).

I am not surprised such treatment exists and could be commonplace, especially for senior citizens employed in the cleaning industry.

I have met some elderly cleaners, working for a pittance, who told me that they are expected to remain standing throughout their work hours, even if their assigned areas are spotlessly clean.

I once asked one such cleaner: "The toilet is so well maintained and there is nothing more to clean. Why don't you just take a seat and rest for a while, and get up to clean the area when the need arises?"

His answer: "No, I can't because if the supervisor sees me I'll be fined \$50." When asked, he told me he was paid about \$800 a month.

Imagine, if he sat down 16 times in the course of a month, he wouldn't be paid a cent. What right does the cleaning company have to impose such a penalty?

Of course, everyone likes a clean toilet but expecting a cleaner to stand still like a robot is clearly thoughtless exploitation.

The authorities encourage the elderly to work into their golden years but more can be done to address such abuse.

There must be legislation in place to ensure employers do not have the right to arbitrarily impose financial penalties. If such penalties are imposed there should be a limit to the fine, based on the monthly salary.

Many employers get away with such rules because many of their workers do not know the legality of such practices, thereby opening the door to abuse.

The authorities should take the lead to ensure such abuse is not condoned and act on it rigorously when a complaint is made about a company.