
13 March 2019

Woman charged for unlicensed estate agency work

The Council for Estate Agencies (CEA) brought four charges in Court today against a 43-year-old Singaporean woman, Vanessa Thien Cai Yan (田彩彦) for allegedly holding herself out to the public as being ready to undertake estate agency work as an estate agent and conducting estate agency work without being licensed by CEA.

2. Thien had allegedly represented to the public, including home owners, that she was a part-time property agent who could assist them in their room rental transactions for a commission. She had also allegedly advertised the rental of rooms on online platforms, conducted a viewing, and closed a room rental transaction.

3. Under the Estate Agents Act¹, it is an offence for an entity and/or an individual to act as an estate agent or for an individual to hold himself or herself out to the public as being ready to undertake, whether or not for payment or other remuneration, estate agency work as an estate agent in any property transactions if he or she is not licensed by the CEA.

¹ Under the Estate Agents Act (Cap. 95A), “estate agents” refer to estate agency businesses (sole-proprietors, partnerships, and companies) or individuals who do estate agency work. Estate agency businesses are commonly known as property agencies. Salespersons refer to individuals who perform estate agency work. They are commonly known as property agents.

CEA's charges against Vanessa Thien

4. Thien was charged in Court under the EAA for the following four charges:
 - a) Three charges under Section 28(1)(c) of the EAA, for holding herself out as being ready to undertake, whether or not for payment or other remuneration (whether monetary or otherwise), estate agency work as an estate agent without first being licensed by CEA; and
 - b) One charge under Section 28(1)(b) of the EAA, for acting as an estate agent without first being licensed by CEA.

CEA's allegations against Thien

5. The alleged modus operandi used by Vanessa Thien was to contact individuals who have posted rental advertisements online and introduce herself as a part-time property agent who could assist them in their transactions for a commission. If a home owner or his property agent was agreeable, she would help to advertise the property, arrange for viewing, and facilitate the transaction.

6. On 2 October 2017, Thien messaged a property agent via the online portal Carousell and Short Message Service and allegedly introduced herself as a part-time property agent looking to co-broke with him on a rental transaction for a room in a Housing & Development Board (HDB) flat at Punggol that he had advertised on Carousell. In her messages, Thien allegedly said that she had prospective tenants whom she could introduce to the agent and asked to share 50 per cent of the commission that he would receive from his clients upon closing of the transaction.

7. Acting on the information received on Thien in relation to the Punggol flat, CEA conducted surveillance on Vanessa Thien's online accounts. Further investigations revealed that Thien had allegedly represented herself as a part-time agent to family members of the owner of a second HDB flat at Punggol, as well as to prospective tenants. Thien had contacted the owner's family member through the latter's listing of the room rental on Carousell. Thien was also looking

to charge the owner 25 per cent of one month's rental as commission if she closed the transaction.

8. It was also revealed that sometime around November 2017 and December 2017, Thien allegedly assisted another landlord to rent out a room at a third HDB flat at Sengkang. She had advertised the rental of the room on Facebook, introduced the tenant to the landlord, facilitated the lease of the property, and received a commission of S\$137.50 from the landlord.

9. At all material times, Thien was not an estate agent licensed by the CEA.

10. The punishment of each offence under Section 28(1)(b) and 28(1)(c) of the EAA is a fine not exceeding \$75,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both. In the case of a continuing offence, there is a further fine not exceeding \$7,500 for every day or part thereof during which the offence continues after conviction.

11. CEA cautions individuals and entities against conducting unlicensed estate agency work and using online property portals to facilitate such work by advertising properties for sale or lease if they are not licensed by CEA.

Advice for Consumers

12. CEA advises consumers who choose to have a property agent to assist them in their property transactions to engage only property agencies and property agents licensed and registered with CEA. The public can verify whether an entity or individual is licensed or registered with CEA via the [Public Register](#) on the CEA website.

13. When consumers respond to online advertisements, they should check whether they are liaising with the owner directly or with the property agent representing the owner. If it is the latter, consumers should check that the agent is registered with CEA. A property agent is required to display his registration

number in his online advertisements. Consumers should exercise caution if the registration number is not displayed.

14. The public can report those who perform unlicensed estate agency work to CEA at 1800-6432555 or feedback@cea.gov.sg. Consumers can visit www.cea.gov.sg/happyconsumer for more information on engaging a professional and effective property agency and agent, and for tips to work harmoniously with a property agent for their property transaction.

About the Council for Estate Agencies

The Council for Estate Agencies (CEA) is a statutory board established in 2010 under the Estate Agents Act to regulate and promote the development of a professional and trusted real estate agency industry. The key responsibilities of CEA are to license property agencies and register property agents, promote the integrity and competence of property agencies and property agents, and equip consumers with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions in property transactions involving property agents. For more information, please visit: www.cea.gov.sg.