



Republic of the Philippines  
Senate

OFFICE OF SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA

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**MEMORANDUM**

**FOR: CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**THRU: SENATE PRESIDENT VICENTE C. SOTTO III**  
**SEN. FRANKLIN M. DRILON**  
**SEN. PANFILO "PING" M. LACSON**  
**SEN. CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE T. GO**  
**SEN. PIA S. CAYETANO**

**FROM: SEN. LEILA M. DE LIMA**

**RE: COMMENTS ON THE 9<sup>th</sup> WEEKLY REPORT OF THE**  
**PRESIDENT DATED 25 May 2020**

**DATE: 27 May 2020**

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I humbly submit my comments on the President's 9<sup>th</sup> Weekly Report dated 25 May 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) I note that the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Social Amelioration Program (SAP)- Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations was not able to distribute the cash aid to 447,721 households at a considerable total amount of Php 2.49 billion.
- 2) There were several news reports about a number of honest beneficiaries across the country who voluntarily returned the emergency cash subsidy under the SAP.
  - a. May the Executive Department include in the next report the total number of these beneficiaries who returned their cash aid and the total amount they remitted?
  - b. On 16 April 2020, the DSWD in a press briefing admitted that the agency amended its guidelines on the SAP to "expedite distribution" since the validation process has been causing delays. The agency also announced that families who "accidentally" got more aid than intended would not receive subsidy the next month. May we know the status of the validation and cross-checking process of qualified beneficiaries who received ESP, CAMP and TUPAD to ensure

that there is no duplication of cash aid given by the government in the second tranche?

- 3) The Memorandum dated 22 May 2020 from the Executive Secretary implies the exclusion of SAP beneficiaries from GCQ areas in the second tranche, except those who belong to industries and sectors affected by the continuous restrictions in their operation, to wit:

“While it is only natural that most beneficiaries would come from still living in Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) areas, as stricter of community quarantine deprive more people means of support, household beneficiaries most affected by the continuing restrictions in the operation of certain industries and sectors in areas under a General Community Quarantine may still be considered in the Second Tranche.”

I put on record my strong opposition to this pronouncement of the President, through the Executive Secretary, as it goes against Section 4 (c) of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act”, which clearly provides that around 18 million low-income families are entitled to subsidies in the amount ranging from PhpP5,000.00 to PhP8,000.00 for two (2) months. Those who are qualified to receive the first tranche, as long as they did not receive any other assistance from other government assistance program, are still eligible to receive the second tranche of cash aid. Considering the serious impact of this pandemic, the cash aid has proven to be both a lifeline and a safety net to many poor households who have been hit hardest among all the affected sectors.

- 4) I am positively counting on the success of the ReliefAgad System Web Application. Through Senate Bill No. 1468, I have been pushing for the maximization of technological platforms that enable transparency in the flow of information, and that ultimately help in the delivery of public service, i.e., the faster receipt of the much needed cash assistance of the beneficiaries. I am glad that a hybrid application system (online and manual methods) has been finally adopted, especially considering the addition of 5 million poor households. I am looking forward to see more details about the progress on this aspect and how it will figure in the forthcoming guidelines on the distribution of the SAP subsidies in the second tranche.
- 5) Under the section pertaining to “assistance to OFWs”, may we know if there were any confirmed positive cases among the 24,000 OFWs who were cleared and allowed to go home? We would appreciate the inclusion of the summary of test results conducted in the next report as part of this section.
- 6) On the issue of protecting Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), there are observers who claim that the government has not fully reported all prison deaths, which is disconcerting considering that COVID-19 is spreading more quickly and widely in closed and severely congested places such as jails and prisons, as evidenced by the

alarming incidents of outbreaks in a jail in Cebu City and the women's correctional facility in Mandaluyong City. Where can complete data on infection and deaths in our jails and prisons be accessed? More importantly, what have we been doing to contain the viral spread and responding to the health concerns of our personnel and inmates in such facilities?

- 7) Considering the reports that more than 300 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed among those behind bars, mostly coming from the detention facilities in Cebu, may I recommend that the measures on testing, isolation and treatment being implemented in Cebu City be replicated in other jails and prisons where there are suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases to ensure the safety of both PDLs and the employees working in these places.
- 8) I welcome the inclusion of the data I requested related to the release of qualified PDLs who are non-recidivists and those with pre-existing conditions. I hope that the number of those qualified for release will significantly increase in the coming weeks in our effort to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus that has infected both PDLs and the prison staff.
- 9) I suggest that the DILG, in partnership with other concerned agencies, to come up with a public awareness drive to prevent gender-based violence and come up with a hotline where the public can report such human rights abuses. We will appreciate further updates on this suggestion in the next report.
- 10) I propose intensifying the government's efforts in cracking down cybercrime activities such as online financial scams, sexual harassments, and, most horribly, the online child sexual exploitation, which have been reportedly prevalent since the onset of the lockdown. May we know the particular programs, if any, that have been adopted in this respect.
- 11) On the matter of Human Resources for Health (HRH), adding to the recurring observation that there has been a very slow and minimal hiring and deployment of HRH to hospitals and quarantine facilities, there is also a need for the DOH:
  - a. To address the continued confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection among our healthcare workers;
  - b. To include in the next report the target number of health workers actually needed to augment our health care system, with particulars on how many should be deployed to public and private hospital and facilities. We need this targeting and mapping-out exercises so we will know the human resource component of our capability to meet the potential challenge of 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of infections as we gradually ease up the lockdown measures.

- 12) On the strengthening of contact tracing measures, during the Senate's Committee of the Whole Hearing last week, we are all in agreement of the need to beef up not only our testing capacity but our contact tracing efforts as well. I support the call of the World Health Organization Representative Dr. Socorro Escalante who urged the DOH to push harder and work harder in our parallel efforts of contact tracing which she described as "slow". A detailed update and status of the hiring of the needed 94,000 contact tracers, or an equivalent program, in the next report will be highly appreciated.
- 13) Despite our ramped-up testing capacity given the increase in accredited testing laboratories for COVID-19, the IATF admitted during the Committee of the Whole hearing that we still have a big number of testing backlog. May we know the current number of backlogs? This representation believes, along with other Senators, that we cannot honestly flatten the curve if we cannot proceed with mass testing and address the problem of having thousands of test backlogs.
- 14) With respect to budget measures, this representation reiterates our consistent observation in our past comments that there is *no* transparency in the utilization of public funds being used in the government's COVID-19 response. We call on the Executive Branch to put up a transparency portal that will show complete and accurate data on public funds realigned and spent in the government's response to this pandemic. The portal should also show all loan contracts and financing agreements entered into by the government for COVID-19 response and efforts to boost our economy for the sake of transparency and accountability to the public.
- 15) We reiterate our query on the Php45.7 billion budget released to the Department of Health (DOH). The said amount was in the DBM list of fund releases for COVID-19. The appropriations cover used was the "Unprogrammed Appropriations." My question is why such a huge amount not part of the 6<sup>th</sup>, and all succeeding reports of the President to Congress? While there was a mention of it in the 5<sup>th</sup> report of the President which reads "DBM, through the Procurement Service, approved and issued a Special Allotment Release Order dated 23 April 2020 in the amount of Php45.717 billion...", it was not part of the table of fund releases. Worse, there are no details as to what the Php45.7 billion is for. We repeat our request for the breakdown of the Php45.7 billion fund.
- 16) May we know if there was any budget realigned to fund the implementation of the Balik Probinsya program that is based on the provisions of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act"? If so, this representation requests for the details of any fund sourcing and utilization in the next report.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.



**LEILA M. DE LIMA**

Chairperson

Committee on Social Justice,

Rural Welfare and Development