



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 7th WEEKLY REPORT OF THE
PRESIDENT DATED 11 May 2020

DATE: 13 May 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 7th Weekly Report dated 11 May 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) The deadline for distributing cash aid for the first (1st) tranche has been extended thrice, with the last to end on 13 May 2020. In his press briefing on 12 May 2020, DSWD Secretary Rolando Bautista disclosed that of the 18 million family beneficiaries nationwide, around 90 percent of it, or 16.3 million households, have received their subsidies. He added that 1,035 of the 1,634 local government units (LGUs) have completed their subsidy payouts, while only 141 LGUs have submitted their liquidation reports.

Is the DSWD standing firm on the findings stated in the previous weekly reports that the inability to meet the deadline for the distribution of the 1st tranche of cash aid was mainly due to reasons attributable to the LGUs, primarily: (a) there were threats against DSWD personnel from some LGU officials; and (c) there has been slow processing at the barangay level because of politicizing or inaccurate lists of qualified beneficiaries? What has the DSWD, DILG, DOJ and/or any other agency taken by way of corrective actions, i.e. initiating formal investigation, and filing of administrative and criminal cases against those LGU officials and employees?

- 2) For the second (2nd) tranche of cash aid distribution, DSWD Secretary Bautista reported in the same press briefing on 12 May 2020 that the DSWD itself will directly handle the subsidy payouts, in partnership with the DND and the AFP, as directed by the President.

What then will be the role of the LGUs this time? Isn't the DSWD understaffed to service all 1,634 LGUs across the country and finish the job in a little more than two (2) weeks to go before the end of May, the deadline for the 2nd tranche of cash aid?

What adjustments will be made in terms of capacitating our soldiers, as assistants of DSWD employees, in directly dealing with civilians who will be lining up en masse during the payouts?

Will the DSWD adopt several proposals for expedited payouts, from such civil society groups as the Philippine COVID-19 Action Network (PHCAN), who suggested to the IATF the employment of such measures as: (a) the relaxation of documentary requirements; (b) the adoption of a vouching system in the community or barangay; (c) the issuance of an advisory or notice well ahead of time that will schedule claimants' attendance based, for instance, on their last names, to avoid congestion in payout centers; and (d) if time permits, the convening of relevant stakeholders, such as banks, finance technology companies, remittance centers and telecommunication companies to run alternative distribution channels for cash distribution, such as cash cards, load and e-money.

- 3) On 12 May 2020, the Presidential Spokesperson has announced that the second (2nd) tranche of cash aid for poor families will be limited only to those in areas still under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), i.e., the National Capital Region (NCR), Laguna and Cebu City. As there are just around 2.5 million families under the subsidy program in these three (3) areas, this means that, of the 18 million total beneficiaries nationwide who were targeted in the 1st tranche, there will be around 15.5 million poor families in the rest of the country who will now be left out as they are no longer entitled to receive cash assistance from the national government for the month of May.

Isn't this decision illegal and unfair? Section 4 (c) of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act", expressly provides that around 18 million low-income families are entitled to subsidies in the amount ranging from PhP5,000.00 to PhP8,000.00 for two (2) months. Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 1, Series of 2020, which spells out the special guidelines on the provision of social amelioration measures by the DSWD, DOLE and other agencies, is likewise explicit when it declares in its Section 5.1 that: "In accordance with RA 11469, the ESP shall be

implemented for two months covering the months of April and May, 2020.”

This perfunctory exclusion of those 15.5 million families, who are in the non-ECQ areas starting May 16, is also unfair – nay, inhumane – considering that they would have already spent the first half of the month of May still in lockdown, and in a span of one (1) week or two (2) after its lifting, these poor families cannot possibly be expected to be back on track with their jobs or other sources of income, given the already ravaging effects that the pandemic has caused to their lives and livelihoods all this time.

- 4) The progress reported in the 7th weekly report about the Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS) program is encouraging, as it is claimed to be a relatively faster and more efficient substitute measure for distributing subsidies to formal workers, that make use of records and systems of the BIR and SSS. Thus, it has reportedly reached 65% of the target 3.4 million employees, whose applications have been approved, as of 7 May 2020.

How do we ensure that no double payments will be made to employees who already received subsidies under the discontinued DOLE program for formal workers, the CAMP (COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program)?

Will SBWS program be applicable for non-ECQ areas after 16 May 2020?

Does SBWS cover such enterprises as small private schools, community-based cooperatives, and family-run shops?

- 5) On the issue of support to marginalized and small farmers and fisherfolk (MSFFs), it is good to find out in the 7th weekly report that the DA has made modifications to streamline the lending process under its Expanded SURE Aid and Recovery Project. However, the new report has added only 872 MSFFs borrowers from last week’s 1,376, making the latest tally at just 2,248. The number of program beneficiaries being targeted is 40,000 MSFFs. Maybe, as we suggested previously, the better approach is for the DA to not just streamline the process but to convert the whole lending program into a simplified subsidy project, akin to that being offered to small rice farmers, or to small businesses under the SBWS program.
- 6) On the issue of protecting Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), the BJMP reported that it has provided paralegal assistance to PDLs that resulted in the expedited release of 4,188 PDLs from 17 March to 30 April 2020. May this figure be clarified vis-à-vis the 9,731 PDLs that were released by the Supreme Court from 17 March to 29 April 2020, as announced by Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta? Does this mean that the remainder could refer to PDLs previously under the custody of provincial and sub-provincial jails under the

provincial government, and other detention centers outside the BJMP jurisdiction?

DOJ reports that the interim rules of Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP) will take effect on 15 May 2020 after its publication, and that it the BPP is already reviewing an initial batch of potentially qualified PDLs. We hope a progress report can be given on this matter, expecting an expedited processing of applications with the BPP on the days to come.

- 7) The 7th weekly report, like the one before it, is silent on any development related to the findings made by Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) in the 5th weekly report that 1,927 elderly PDLs have existing medical conditions and 804 are non-recidivists, making them all qualified for early release. A future report containing updates on this matter will be appreciated.
- 8) On the matter of Human Resources for Health (HRH), the Department of Health (DOH) should be required to explain why it has only approved the emergency hiring of 3,042 HRH, per the 7th weekly report, when the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has already given the go-ahead to hire 15,757 temporary health workers. Worse, even with the already small number of slots approved by the DOH, only 968 HRH were hired.

We reiterate to the DOH that all facets of engagement of HRH -- from hiring, training and deployment -- should considerably pick up in terms of coverage and speed, given the magnitude of the problems that the health sector is confronting in this pandemic.


- 9) It is reported that our laboratories have already a combined capacity to test over 8,000 persons per day for COVID-19. However, the challenge of mass testing is further saddled with obstacles, such as the reported lack of reagents needed for testing per se, and the shortage in personnel to man the accredited COVID-19 testing centers. How true are these reports? If true, how do the DOH and IATF intend to immediately address these hurdles?
- 10) With respect to budget measures, we repeat our observation in our past comments, almost like a broken record now, that there was *no* transparency in the utilization of public funds, as proven by a consistent lack of accounting of all the money being used in the government's COVID-19 response. The 7th weekly report, just like the 6th submission before it, merely indicated that there were no further releases made from the pooled savings from discontinued programs, activities and projects (PAPs), and that the total allotments and cash allocations that were released to agencies are the same as reported in the 5th weekly report. This is flimsy pencil-pushing. As with the earlier reports, there was really *no* explanation as to: which specific programs, activities, projects were discontinued; what particular general purpose funds were

abandoned; what specific GOCC-held money was taken; and, most importantly, how these government funds were actually utilized and liquidated. There was no explanation about the various facets of fund sourcing, utilization, and liquidation.

- 11) Finally, the DOF should be required to submit copies of the loan contracts, financing agreements and related documents relevant to the total US\$4.75 Billion in budgetary support from the ADB, World bank and USD-denominated global bonds, as well as the US\$108 Million in grants and loan financing from the ADB and the World Bank, which are all stated in the 7th weekly report.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.


LEILA M. DE LIMA
Chairperson
Committee on Social Justice,
Rural Welfare and Development