



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 8th WEEKLY REPORT OF THE
PRESIDENT DATED 18 May 2020

DATE: 20 May 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 8th Weekly Report dated 18 May 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) The deadline for distributing the first (1st) tranche of cash aid has ended last 13 May 2020 after being extended thrice. Although the report indicated that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) already issued show-cause orders to 43 local chief executives for them to explain their poor or slow distribution of the financial aid despite all the extensions given to them, there is still a serious number of poor and low-income households totaling 900,000 who still have not received the promised cash aid. 153, 543 of these are 4Ps households and 755,255 are non-4Ps beneficiaries. This must be urgently addressed.
- 2) I noticed that from the 4.4 million target 4Ps beneficiaries expected to receive expanded cash assistance in previous weekly reports of the President, there has been an adjusted target of 4.2 million households in the 8th weekly report of the President. This resulted to the exclusion of more than 156, 231 target beneficiaries from the original 18 million households targeted in the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act. Can the DSWD clarify this?
- 3) For the second (2nd) tranche of cash aid distribution, the government must assure the public of a more expeditious, orderly

and efficient distribution of the Social Amelioration Program. But there seems to be unclear policy pronouncements from the agencies regarding this matter.

First, on several press briefings, the Presidential Spokesperson announced that the second (2nd) tranche of cash aid for poor families would be limited only to those in areas still under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). On 14 May 2020, he claimed that due to limited budget, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) has decided to exclude families within the general community quarantine (GCQ) areas from SAP. He justified this action by saying that people can *First* already go back to work in the GCQ areas and that Congress only approved a P205-billion fund. Let me state again my position that this decision is 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.” Therefore, the qualified beneficiaries of SAP which continues to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless being under ECQ or GCQ, are legally entitled of this assistance.

Second, based on reports from the ground, some barangays are distributing SAP forms again. Will there be another application and verification process for the distribution of the 2nd tranche of cash aid?

Third, what then will be the role of the LGUs in the distribution of the 2nd tranche? Will the DSWD take over the distribution for LGUs who failed to liquidate on time? The agency must have foresight and capability to meet this administrative challenge. The poor families who are in dire need of this aid must not suffer further due to the inefficiencies in the distribution.

I wish to reiterate my appeal to the implementing agencies of the SAP for clear and effective guidelines, especially for the roll out of the 2nd tranche. We observed that the changing of policies and guidelines have caused much confusion and delays which could have been avoided had the agencies concerned exercised more diligence in their work. The guidelines must also consider the conditions of the vulnerable sectors -- the senior citizens, PWDs and pregnant women -- and put an end to burdensome requirements imposed upon them.

- 4) Can we distribute the Social Amelioration Program cash aid through reloadable cash cards, which are cheaper in terms of administrative cost and appear to be a more sustainable platform and mechanism for channeling cash aid from the government?
- 5) On May 4, 2020, Malacanang, thru Secretary Roque, announced that the government will provide cash aid under the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) to an additional five (5) million qualified recipients on top of the initial 18 million beneficiaries. Since then, there was no action from government regarding this pronouncement. When will this be implemented and how will the application and validation process be done? I filed SBN 1468 that proposes a hybrid application process for beneficiaries of the government's social protection assistance. Is it possible to have a manual and online application process for the additional beneficiaries?
- 6) The progress reported in the 8th weekly report about the Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS) program is notable. However, there is a need to put into writing and report to Congress the validation and cross-checking process of qualified beneficiaries of the said program and assure us and the public that there will be no duplication of cash aid given by the government under other forms of SAP, such as the AICS / ESP, CAMP and TUPAD, among others. This is important in the massive distribution of the 2nd tranche of the cash aid where beneficiaries of the SBWS must not be the same households to receive the next allotment of assistance.
- 7) The Social Amelioration Dashboard for Emergency Subsidy of the DSWD is laudable which reports the financial performance and distribution rate of the program by region and province. It must be replicated by other agencies in reporting their performance in delivering their own forms of assistance programs.
- 8) Under the section pertaining to "assistance to OFWs", the same does not include services provided for OFWs in quarantine facilities. We received various reports of "escaping" OFWs from different quarantine facilities due to various reasons, such as allegedly the facilities are inhabitable, and that there has been a month-long delay in the release of COVID-19 test results. How is the government addressing the need for such services for our returning OFWs who are staying in in these facilities?
- 9) On the issue of support to marginalized and small farmers and fisherfolk (MSFFs), may I also suggest to the the Department of Agriculture to partner with social enterprises in the distribution of agricultural products from indigenous communities who are also affected by the lockdown. They must also be included in food logistics plan that the Department is crafting.

- 10) On the issue of protecting Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), 9,731 PDLs were released from 17 March to 29 April 2020, as announced by Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta. This figure is different from the number published in the report. From 16 March to 5 May 2020, the PAO was able to secure the release of a total of 4,348 PDLs. There seems to be unclear reporting with the number of PDLs released. Can the BJMP clarify this?
- 11) I welcome the development that the Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP) has already initiated the processing of applications for executive clemency pursuant to BPP Resolution No. OT 04-14-2020 or the “Interim Rules on Parole and Executive Clemency”. A detailed update in the next report will be highly appreciated.
- 12) The 8th weekly report is consistently 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. I find it essential to include pertinent updates on this matter in the next weekly report.
- 13) On the matter of Human Resources for Health (HRH), despite the Department of Budget and Management (DBM)’s approval to hire 15,757 temporary health workers, the DOH minimally approved the number of slots for emergency hiring at 5,601. The Department continues to have a slow hiring and deployment of HRH to hospitals and quarantine facilities. This is an emerging threat to our health care system considering that we are slowly reopening the economy and the risk of a higher infection rate is plausible.
- 14) It is reported that despite our increased testing capacity with more accredited testing laboratories for COVID-19, we have incurred 7,000 tests as backlog as of 14 May 2020. The DOH and IATF must immediately address this challenge.
- 15) With respect to budget measures, this representation continues to put on record our 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. For instance, on April 23, Php45.7 billion was released to the Department of Health (DOH). This was in the DBM list of fund releases for COVID-19. The appropriations cover used was the “Unprogrammed Appropriations.” I agree that such an enormous amount is needed to counter the huge challenges of our health sector given this pandemic. But my question is why such a huge amount not part of the 6th, 7th and current reports of the President to Congress? It’s not even in the table of fund releases of the said report. While there was a mention of it in the 5th 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. Can we be clarified on the breakdown of the Php45.7 billion? It’s probably not for testing kits since there’s a separate Php1.9 billion release for that. A sizable amount of Php45.7B requires transparent reporting, which has been our consistent comment on the weekly reports of the President. I strongly urge 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 the loan contracts and financing agreements entered into by the government for the sake of transparency and accountability to the public.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.


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