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SENATE

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Introduced by **SENATOR JOEL VILLANUEVA**

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**RESOLUTION**

**DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER AND TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE, TO INQUIRE AND REVIEW, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, THE PREPAREDNESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, STUDENTS AND FACULTY TO SHIFT TO ONLINE MODES OF LEARNING IN LIGHT OF THE CONTINUING THREAT OF THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) AND THE STATUS OF THE INTERNET CONNECTIVITY IN THE COUNTRY**

**WHEREAS**, On March 16, 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entire Luzon on Enhanced Community Quarantine effective from March 17 to April 13, 2020, which resulted in the shift to online or alternative modes of learning in institutions of learning, and telecommuting work arrangements in both the private and public sectors;

**WHEREAS**, On April 7, 2020, the President further extended the duration of the Enhanced Community Quarantine to April 30, 2020. On April 24, the President announced the further extension of the quarantine until May 15 in the National Capital Region and other high risk areas in Luzon, thereby expanding the exigencies that resulted from the same;

**WHEREAS**, The shift to telecommuting work arrangements and alternative modes of learning during this period has emphasized the need for an accessible, reliable and fast internet connection in order to continue business-as-usual. With regard online learning, some universities, such as the University of the Philippines, have even completely suspended all alternative modes of learning, including internet-based learning, after recognizing that not all students have access to the internet, while some of those who have internet connection, also encounter some

form of internet connectivity problems, with some students and faculty having as low as five megabits per second (Mbps) internet speed. Meanwhile, De La Salle University, while shifting to online learning, has allowed students who cannot participate in online learning to complete the course requirements for a period of one year.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, various netizens on social media have complained about the slow internet connection in the country, which hampered their ability to continue working remotely, and to communicate effectively with their colleagues;

**WHEREAS**, Experts predict that social distancing measures will still be necessary even after the enhanced community quarantine is lifted, and may last up to the end of this year. This means that higher education institutions may be forced to shift to online modes of learning for its classes for the rest of 2020;

**WHEREAS**, Republic Act No. 10929, otherwise known as the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act, mandates the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to provide free internet in public places, such national and local government offices, public basic education institutions, state universities and colleges, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) technology institutions, public hospitals, health centers, rural health units, public parks, plazas, libraries, barangay reading centers, public airports, seaports, and public transport terminals;

**WHEREAS**, DICT is also mandated under Republic Act No. 10844, otherwise known as the Department of Information and Communications Technology Act of 2015, to improve public access to information and communications technology by, among others, prescribing rules and regulations for the establishment, operation and maintenance of ICT infrastructures in unserved and underserved areas, and establishing a free internet service that can be accessed in government offices and public areas using the most cost-effective telecommunications technology. Pursuant to its mandate, DICT prepared a National Broadband Plan “to accelerate the deployment of fiber optic cables and wireless technologies, and improve the overall internet speed and affordability all over the country, particularly in remote areas;”<sup>2</sup>

**WHEREAS**, The shift to online modes of learning necessitates the need for a reliable, accessible and affordable internet connection to ensure that all students will be able to participate in online classes on the one hand, and the professors will be able to communicate with their students effectively, on the other;

**WHEREAS**, Key factors that must be looked into as higher education institutions shift to online modes of learning is the availability of free internet and a reliable internet connection. As of December 2018, there are already 2,163 hotspot areas where free public internet is available. In 2019, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) targeted to establish an additional 5,308 hotspot areas all over the country. Meanwhile, as of April 2019, the Philippines

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<sup>1</sup> DLSU FAQs for Term 2, AY 2019-2020. Available at [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LbUcVI6-V7HPL4-Z0SrnqWShUsCBfqGWjv7\\_Te-u49c/edit?fbclid=IwAR38G4XM314n\\_4f10qzRanxtCm73Wc\\_CvVHQwh\\_kbW0gyvHVrg4PJq4tIXI#slide=id.g83429398db\\_0\\_183](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LbUcVI6-V7HPL4-Z0SrnqWShUsCBfqGWjv7_Te-u49c/edit?fbclid=IwAR38G4XM314n_4f10qzRanxtCm73Wc_CvVHQwh_kbW0gyvHVrg4PJq4tIXI#slide=id.g83429398db_0_183) (date last accessed: April 20, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The National Broadband Plan. Available at <https://dict.gov.ph/national-broadband-plan/> (date last accessed: April 23, 2020).

ranked 103<sup>rd</sup> out of 139 countries surveyed in terms of internet speed according to Speedtest Global Index;<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, Considering the increased demand for better internet connection brought about by the shift to alternative modes of learning in higher education institutions, the status of the implementation of Republic Act No. 10929 and the establishment of free public Wi-Fi areas, and the over-all efforts being undertaken by the government to improve and upgrade access and connectivity to affordable and fast internet connection across the country must be carefully studied;

**RESOLVE BY THE SENATE**, to direct the Senate Committee on Higher and Technical and Vocational Education, Committee on Science and Technology and other appropriate committees of the Senate, to inquire and review, in aid of legislation, the preparedness of higher education institutions, students and faculty to shift to online modes of learning in light of the continuing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and the status of the internet connectivity in the country.

Adopted,

  
**SENATOR JOEL VILLANUEVA**

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<sup>3</sup> 2019, April 18. PH internet speed still below global average: Speedtest. Available at <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/04/18/19/ph-internet-speed-still-below-global-average-speedtest> (date last accessed: April 23, 2020).