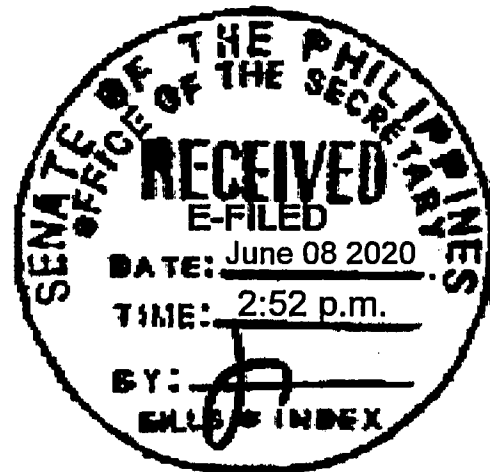


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)



SENATE

P.S. Res. No. 442

Introduced by **SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA**

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE ALARMING NUMBER OF CASES OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS GETTING INFECTED WITH COVID-19 IN THE PHILIPPINES, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF IMPLEMENTING URGENT CORRECTIVE MEASURES, AND IDENTIFYING ACCOUNTABILITY BY DETERMINING WHETHER THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HAS IMPLEMENTED APPROPRIATE PROTOCOLS AND SAFETY MEASURES FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS, IN A TIMELY MANNER, TO MINIMIZE IF NOT ELIMINATE THE RISK OF CONTRACTING COVID-19 IN THE COURSE OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTY

1 WHEREAS, Article II, Section 15 of the 1987 Constitution provides that “[t]he
2 State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people”;

3 WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 12 of the same mandates that the State shall
4 “undertake appropriate health, manpower development, and research, responsive to
5 the country's health needs and problems”;

6 WHEREAS, on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO)
7 declared COVID-19 as a pandemic after it has spread globally¹. Correspondingly, on 17
8 March 2020, President Rodrigo R. Duterte issued Presidential Proclamation No. 929
9 placing the Philippines under a State of Calamity;²

¹ Ducharme, J. “World Health Organization Declares COVID-19 a ‘Pandemic.’ Here’s What That Means.” 11 March 2020. Time. Retrieved from: <https://time.com/5791661/who-coronavirus-pandemic-declaration/>

² “Philippines under state of calamity due to COVID-19.” 17 March 2020. CNN Philippines Retrieved from: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/3/17/ph-state-of-calamity-coronavirus.html>

1 WHEREAS, on 14 March 2020, as the Philippine General Hospital (PGH)
2 prepared to operate as a COVID-19 referral center, it pleaded to the public for health
3 supply donations;³

4 WHEREAS, on 21 April 2020, the WHO sounded the alarm on the high
5 number of healthcare workers in the Philippines being infected by COVID-19. “The
6 worrisome trend we are seeing in the Philippines where the percentage of about 13
7 percent is worrisome. In our region it is around 2-3 percent. The Philippines is a bit
8 of an outlier”, WHO-Western Pacific Region COVID-19 Incident manager Dr. Abdi
9 Mahamud said;⁴

10 WHEREAS, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) announced
11 that 43 of its healthcare workers tested positive with COVID-19 which forced the
12 institution to temporarily scale down its operations – delaying further the release of
13 COVID-19 test results, and significantly affecting the response of the government to
14 the pandemic;⁵

15 WHEREAS, on 21 April 2020, several news outlets reported that the DOH
16 attributed the rising number of infected cases of healthcare workers to community
17 exposure and long shifts and not on the lack of shortage of personal protective
18 equipment or PPEs.⁶ The Philippine News Agency (PNA), the official news agency of
19 the Philippine government which is under the supervision and control of the News
20 and Information Bureau, an attached agency of the Presidential Communications
21 Operations Office, published in its official website the article titled “COVID cases
22 among healthcare workers not PPE-related: DOH.” The said article recounted the
23 statement made by DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire in a virtual media
24 briefing, to wit: “*kalaunan, nakikita natin*, it's not really the PPE, it's something that

³ “Health workers, frontliners appeal for masks and alcohol donations in fight vs. COVID-19.” 15 March 2020. CNN Philippines. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/3/15/PGH-COVID-frontliners-health-workers-donations-mask-alcohol.html>

⁴ Esguerra, Christian. “Health workers in Philippines catching COVID-19 ‘worrisome’: WHO official.” 21 April 2020. ABS-CBN News. Retrieved from: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/21/20/health-workers-in-philippines-catching-covid-19-worrisome-who-official>

⁵ Madarang, Catalina. “DOH hit for alleged failure to protect RITM health workers as 43 employees test positive for COVID-19.” 21 April 2020. Interaksyon. Retrieved from: <https://www.interaksyon.com/politics-issues/2020/04/21/166768/doh-hit-for-alleged-failure-to-protect-ritm-health-workers-as-43-employees-test-positive-for-covid-19/>

⁶ “DOH: Community exposure, long shifts led to high infection rate of healthcare workers.” 23 April 2020. CNN Philippines. Retrieved from: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/23/community-exposure-long-shifts-health-worker-infections>

1 when they go home, they go back to work and they get infections outside of their
2 workplaces”;⁷

3 WHEREAS, on 26 April 2020, the DOH in its official Facebook page released
4 a fact-check post which said that the post containing the aforementioned statement
5 that healthcare workers get infections outside of their workplaces was altered”;⁸

6 WHEREAS, on 27 April 2020, a group of nurses called Filipino Nurses United
7 publicly contradicted the claims of the DOH saying that the inadequacy PPE, and
8 severe understaffing that force healthcare workers to serve with long hours of duty
9 without breaks, were the reason for the high cases of nurses contracting COVID-19.
10 They also lambasted the statement of Sec. Duque and the DOH for blaming the
11 medical workers for their alleged bad habits in handling their PPEs. The group
12 argued that “wearing PPEs for 12 hours of duty for seven days or 14 days straight
13 duty causes nurses to suffer from suffocation, exhaustion, and dehydration because
14 of extreme heat from the coveralls which compromise their breathing.” Such
15 conditions in their workplaces, the group said, have already caused nurses to suffer
16 vertigo, hypertension, fluid, and electrolyte imbalance such as hypokalemia or low
17 potassium levels due to severe perspiration;⁹

18 WHEREAS, by 07 May 2020, the number of healthcare workers infected with
19 COVID-19 climbed to 1, 886. This was announced in the daily press briefing of DOH.
20 However, unlike previous briefings, Usec. Vergeire did not provide a breakdown of
21 the infected healthcare workers' professions. The tally revealed that healthcare
22 workers account for 18.23% of the total COVID-19 cases in the country – or about
23 one (1) healthcare worker for every five (5) infected people;¹⁰

24 WHEREAS, on 08 May 2020, the Facebook page of All-U.P. Workers Union
25 released its letter addressed to University of the Philippines President Danilo
26 Concepcion, where it “expressed with gravest concern the plan of UP-PGH to reuse
27 N95 respirators starting May 18, 2020”;

⁷ Montemayor, Ma. Teresa. “Covid cases among health care workers not PPE-related: DOH.” 23 April 2020. Philippine News Agency. Retrieved from: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1100781>

⁸ DOH Official Facebook page. 26 April 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3261830633828166&set=a.157979910879936>

⁹ Pelayo, Marje. “Nurses group rebuts DOH statement on high COVID-19 infection rate among PH healthcare workers.” 27 April 2020. Yahoo! News. Retrieved from: <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/nurses-group-rebuts-doh-statement-144604625.html>

¹⁰ Rey, Aika. “DOH says 1,886 health workers infected with coronavirus.” 07 May 2020. Rappler. Retrieved from: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260236-health-workers-coronavirus-cases-philippines-may-7-2020>

1 WHEREAS, on 18 May 2020, the number of healthcare workers who tested
2 positive for the coronavirus rose to 2,314, with majority of infections seen in nurses
3 and physicians;¹¹

4 WHEREAS, on 02 June 2020, a day after easing the lockdown measures in
5 Metro Manila by placing it under a General Community Quarantine (GCQ), it was
6 reported that the Alliance of Healthcare Workers (AHW) feared that many more
7 healthcare workers will resign because health authorities fail to address the still-
8 rising number of COVID-19 infected healthcare workers;¹²

9 WHEREAS, healthcare workers play a critical role in improving access and
10 quality health care for the population. However, they have “markedly higher risk of
11 becoming infected with the coronavirus that causes COVID-19...”¹³ In solving this
12 public health emergency, it is vital that the health and lives of healthcare workers,
13 who are manning the frontlines until a cure or vaccine is discovered, are given
14 utmost protection;

15 WHEREAS, while keeping the number of infected cases at bay, the State must
16 also mobilize its resources to strengthen our healthcare system tasked with the most
17 important role of treating those who are infected;

18 WHEREAS, “[w]e know how to protect healthcare workers from this new
19 virus. Fixing the lack of masks and other protective equipment must be a priority:
20 not only is the healthcare system obliged to protect its workers but, importantly, if
21 enough healthcare workers get sick, our healthcare system will collapse”;¹⁴

22 WHEREAS, the sheer disregard for the situation and state of healthcare
23 workers, the continued complaints of the lack of necessary support and the slow
24 response of the government to this public health crisis that expose our healthcare
25 workers to greater risks must not be tolerated, but rather acknowledged and

¹¹ Tomacruz, Sofia. “Number of PH health workers with coronavirus climbs to 2,314.” 18 May 2020. Rappler. Retrieved from: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/261271-health-workers-coronavirus-cases-philippines-may-18-2020>

¹² Lalu, Gabriel. “More health workers to resign if gov’t fails to address their concerns – group.” 02 June 2020. Inquirer. Retrieved from: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1285214/more-health-workers-to-resign-if-govt-fails-to-address-their-concerns-group>

¹³ Shmerling, Robert. “What’s it like to be a healthcare worker in a pandemic?” 08 April 2020. Harvard Health Publishing. Retrieved from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/whats-it-like-to-be-a-healthcare-worker-in-a-pandemic-2020040819485>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

1 appropriately responded to by the government, by implementing corrective measures
2 and holding those responsible accountable;

3 WHEREAS, the invaluable service and heroism of healthcare workers
4 especially during a time where the risks that they are being exposed to are
5 exponentially greater, should not be disregarded, but instead recognized by ensuring
6 that their health and lives are likewise prioritized and protected;

7 **NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY**
8 **RESOLVED**, directing the appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in
9 aid of legislation, into the alarming number of cases of healthcare workers getting
10 infected with COVID-19 in the Philippines, with the end in view of implementing
11 urgent corrective measures, and identifying accountability by determining whether
12 the Department of Health has implemented appropriate protocols and safety
13 measures for healthcare workers, in a timely manner, to minimize if not eliminate
14 the risk of contracting COVID-19 in the course of the performance of their duty.

Adopted,


HEILA M. DE LIMA