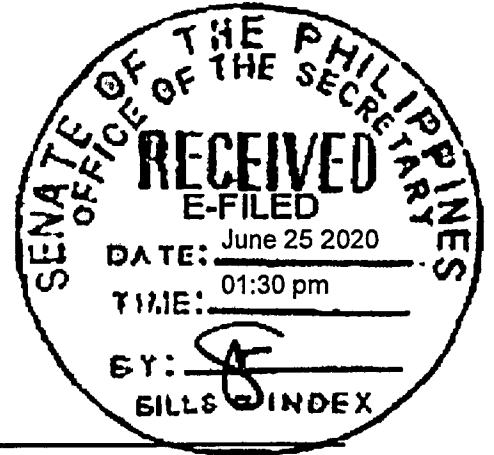


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE )  
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES )  
*Second Regular Session* )



SENATE

P.S. Res. No. 457

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

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**RESOLUTION**  
**DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO**  
**CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE ALLEGED**  
**FAILURE IN THE CONTACT TRACING EFFORTS OF THE**  
**GOVERNMENT, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF UPDATING THE PUBLIC**  
**ON THE STATUS OF THE AFOREMENTIONED EFFORTS AND**  
**IMPROVING THE DISMAL RESPONSE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF**  
**HEALTH (DOH) AGAINST THE SPREAD OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS**

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, in the Philippine government’s efforts to flatten the curve,  
7 Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the “Bayanihan to Heal As One Act”,  
8 was enacted. Section 3 (a) thereof declared that there is an urgent need to “mitigate,  
9 if not contain, the transmission of COVID-19.” Section 4 (a) of the same granted  
10 powers to the President to adopt measures to respond to crisis brought about by the  
11 pandemic – among which is to follow World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines  
12 and best practices, “adopt and implement measures to prevent or suppress further  
13 transmission and spread of COVID-19 through effective education, detection,  
14 protection, and treatment”;

15           WHEREAS, on 18 March 2020, WHO officials stressed the importance of  
16 contact tracing as a key component in every country’s public health response, along

1 with isolation and testing efforts to contain and suppress the spread of the virus.<sup>1</sup>  
2 WHO defines contact tracing as “the process of identifying, assessing, and managing  
3 people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent onward transmission. When  
4 systematically applied, contact tracing will break the chains of transmission of an  
5 infectious disease and is thus an essential public health tool for controlling infectious  
6 disease outbreaks.” Contact tracing for COVID-19 requires identifying persons who  
7 may have been exposed to COVID-19 and following them up daily for 14 days from  
8 the last point of exposure;<sup>2</sup>

9 WHEREAS, contact tracing has been defined by Dr. Laura Breeher, medical  
10 director of occupational health services at the Mayo Clinic, as the technique which is  
11 a “cornerstone” of preventative medicine. It plays a crucial role in the world’s efforts  
12 to combat a very deadly virus while there remains no known cure or vaccine. This  
13 technique has been used in previous outbreaks such as the 2014 Ebola virus  
14 outbreak, as well as in the SARS outbreak in 2003. The world bore witness to how  
15 the first few countries which effectively contained the virus in record time, like South  
16 Korea and New Zealand, have aggressively used contact tracing in their fight against  
17 COVID-19;<sup>3</sup>

18 WHEREAS, as early as 4 February 2020, Department of Health (DOH)  
19 Secretary Duque admitted in a Senate hearing that the DOH encountered difficulties  
20 in conducting contact tracing as the country reported its first two confirmed cases of  
21 COVID-19 – a couple who arrived by plane from Wuhan, China. During the said  
22 hearing, it was disclosed that they had only managed to track down 17% or around 50  
23 of the 331 passengers who were potentially exposed to the COVID-19 positive  
24 passengers;<sup>4</sup>

25 WHEREAS, on 29 April 2020, experts from the University of the Philippines  
26 (UP) revealed in their forecast report the urgent need for the government to  
27 implement an effective contact tracing to those who could have been exposed to  
28 infected individuals. The study has underscored the “weakest link” in the country’s  
29 response to COVID-19. “Mass testing without effective contact tracing will only

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<sup>1</sup> CNN Philippines (17 March 2020) *Philippines under state of calamity due to COVID-19*. Retrieved from:  
<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/3/17/ph-state-of-calamity-coronavirus.html> Accessed last: 18 March 2020

<sup>2</sup> WHO. (10 May 2020) *Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/contact-tracing-in-the-context-of-covid-19> Accessed last: 16 June 2020

<sup>3</sup> Dela Garza, A. (22 April 2020) *What Is Contact Tracing? Here’s How It Could Be Used to Help Fight Coronavirus*. Retrieved  
from: <https://time.com/5825140/what-is-contact-tracing-coronavirus/> Accessed last: 16 June 2020

<sup>4</sup> Paris, J. (4 February 2020) *Senate hearing bares gaps in PH contact tracing for novel coronavirus*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/250957-senate-hearing-reveals-holes-contact-tracing-novel-coronavirus>. Retrieved from:  
Accessed last: 15 June 2020

1 increase the [reproduction number] without stemming possible new infections,  
2 especially once the restrictions are loosened,” they warned.<sup>5</sup> They also added that the  
3 national and local governments should consider hiring and training more personnel  
4 to do contact tracing and utilization of digital contact tracing applications in order to  
5 augment our capacity in containing the spread of COVID-19;<sup>6</sup>

6 WHEREAS, on 14 May 2020, Secretary Duque proposed, in a televised  
7 briefing, that the ideal contact tracers per population ratio is 1 contact tracer for 800  
8 people in order to further curb the transmission of the virus;<sup>7</sup>

9 WHEREAS, on 25 May 2020, WHO acting representative to the Philippines  
10 Dr. Socorro Escalante warned the government on what she described as “slow”  
11 contact tracing efforts. She likewise urged the DOH to push harder and work harder  
12 in our parallel efforts of contact tracing, aside from testing and treating those who  
13 are infected by the COVID-19;<sup>8</sup>

14 WHEREAS, on 26 May 2020, the DOH reported that the country is in need of  
15 additional 94,000 contact tracers for the ideal ratio it earlier admitted of one contact  
16 tracer per 800 people in order to control the spread of COVID-19;<sup>9</sup>

17 WHEREAS, on 27 May 2020, Marikina City 2<sup>nd</sup> District Rep. Stella Quimbo  
18 exposed that an average of 11% of the newly reported positive daily cases of COVID-  
19 19 were categorized under “city unknown” which is indicative of the government’s  
20 substandard contact tracing efforts;<sup>10</sup>

21 WHEREAS, on 7 June 2020, former Department of Information and  
22 Communications Technology (DICT) Undersecretary Eliseo Rio Jr. admitted that the  
23 current and lone contact tracing app StaySafe.ph, developed by Multisys  
24 Technologies Corp. which is a company partly owned by telecommunications giant  
25 PLDT Inc., has privacy protocols issues, and there are serious questions surrounding

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<sup>5</sup> Ornedo, J. (11 May 2020) *Contact tracing weak link in Philippine COVID-19 response –experts*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/737782/contact-tracing-weak-link-in-philippine-covid-19-response-experts/story/> Accessed last: 16 June 2020

<sup>6</sup> Guido & Rye et. al. (29 April 2020) *Forecast Report No. 5: COVID-19 FORECASTS IN THE PHILIPPINES: Sub-National Models for NCR and other Selected Areas*. Retrieved from: [https://www.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/April-29-UP-OCTA-research-Covid-19-in-the-Philippines-forecast-report-No.5\\_eaa.pdf](https://www.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/April-29-UP-OCTA-research-Covid-19-in-the-Philippines-forecast-report-No.5_eaa.pdf). Accessed last 16 June 2020

<sup>7</sup> Magsambol, B. (14 May 2020) *Duque: To stem infections, at least 1 contact tracer needed per 800 people*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260871-duque-response-contract-tracer-needed-per-800-people> Accessed last 16 June 2020

<sup>8</sup> Philippine Star (26 May 2020) *WHO sounds alarm over 'slow' contact tracing efforts in the Philippines*. Retrieved from: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/05/26/2016647/who-sounds-alarm-over-slow-contact-tracing-efforts-philippines> Accessed last: 16 May 2020

<sup>9</sup> Magsambol, B. (14 May 2020) *PH needs 94,000 contact tracers – DOH*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/262033-philippines-needs-contact-tracers> Accessed last: 16 June 2020

<sup>10</sup> Quismorio, E. (28 May 2020). *Poor contact tracing blamed as COVID-19 cases rise*. Retrieved from: <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/28/poor-contact-tracing-blamed-as-covid-19-cases-rise/>. Accessed last: 16 June 2020.

1 its ability to do contact tracing. Questions were also raised regarding the StaySafe.ph  
2 app being the only Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF)-approved digital contact tracing  
3 solution when multiple providers and methods should be considered in order to solve  
4 the complex problem of contact tracing;<sup>11</sup>

5 WHEREAS, on 8 June 2020, in his opening remarks at the media briefing on  
6 COVID-19, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus again  
7 emphasized that contact tracing “remains an essential element of the response”;<sup>12</sup>

8 WHEREAS, in the four months since the first reported cases of the COVID-19  
9 virus in the country and in the nearly three months of continuous implementation of  
10 varying degrees of community quarantine measures nationwide, the problem of  
11 contact tracing remains a persistent issue that needs to be addressed as it gravely  
12 affects the government’s ability to formulate an effective public health response to  
13 the pandemic;

14 WHEREAS, there seems to be deliberate negligence, if not inaction, on the  
15 part of the DOH regarding our contact tracing mechanisms and protocols which is an  
16 essential part of a multi-pronged approach to successfully fight the COVID-19  
17 pandemic;

18 WHEREAS, if unacted upon, the slow contact tracing can lead to more  
19 preventable infections and further delay not only our COVID-19 containment efforts,  
20 but also our economic recovery;

21 WHEREAS, an investigation is necessary to look into the failure of the DOH  
22 and other concerned agencies in effectively carrying out our tracing efforts and  
23 mandate these offices to expeditiously implement corrective actions noting their  
24 inability to flatten the curve and control the increase in positive COVID-19 cases  
25 nationwide;

26 **NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY**  
27 **RESOLVED**, to direct the appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in  
28 aid of legislation, into the alleged failure in the contact tracing efforts of the  
29 Government, with the end in view of updating the public on the status of the

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<sup>11</sup> ABS-CBN News (10 June 2020) *Rio says he was eased out of DICT after questioning contact-tracing app deal*. Retrieved from: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/06/10/20/rio-says-he-was-eased-out-of-dict-after-questioning-contact-tracing-app-deal>  
Accessed last: 16 June 2020

<sup>12</sup> WHO. (08 June 2020) *Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--8-june-2020>

1. aforementioned efforts and improving the dismal response of the Department of
2. Health (DOH) against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

*Adopted,*

  
**LEILA M. DE LIMA**