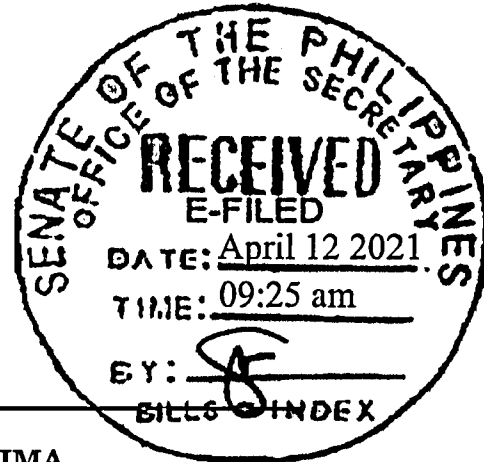


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)

SENATE

P.S. Res. No. 695



Introduced by SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA

RESOLUTION

URGING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE STATUS OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT'S COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAM AMID RECENT REPORTS THAT CERTAIN LOCAL CHIEF EXECUTIVES, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS WERE ABLE TO GET VACCINATED IN VIOLATION OF THE PRIORITIZATION PROTOCOL PUT IN PLACE TO ENSURE TIMELY ACCESS FOR FRONTLINERS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE HEALTH SECTOR AND THE COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORTS

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

4 WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 11 of the same mandates the State to “adopt
5 an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which shall
6 endeavor to make essential goods, health and other social services available to all the
7 people at affordable cost.” The same section further declares that “[t]here shall be
8 priority for the needs of the under-privileged, sick, elderly, disabled, women, and
9 children”;

10 WHEREAS, due to the limited supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, the World
11 Health Organization-Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (WHO-
12 SAGE) released a Prioritization Roadmap of COVID-19 vaccines that considers
13 priority groups for vaccination based on epidemiologic setting and vaccine supply
14 scenarios. In the said roadmap, health care workers topped the list as an A1 priority

1 group due to very high risk of becoming infected and transmitting SARS-CoV-2 in the
2 Community Transmission epidemiologic setting;¹

3 WHEREAS, in preparation for the rollout of the national government's COVID-
4 19 vaccination program, the Interim National Immunization Technical Advisory
5 Group (iNITAG) and the Department of Health (DOH) Technical Advisory Group
6 recommended to the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging
7 Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID), the priority list to be followed in order to ensure
8 equitable access to the vaccines. The list, which was made public on 5 February by
9 Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, is as follows: A1: Frontline workers in health
10 facilities both national and local, private and public, health professionals and non-
11 professionals like students, nursing aides, janitors, barangay health workers, etc.; A2:
12 Senior citizens aged 60 years old and above; A3: Persons with comorbidities; A4:
13 Frontline personnel in essential sectors including uniformed personnel and those in
14 working sectors identified by the IATF as essential during ECQ; A5: Indigent
15 population; B1: Teachers, social workers; B2: Other government workers; B3: Other
16 essential workers; B4: Socio-demographic groups at significantly higher risk other
17 than senior citizens and indigenous people; B5: Overseas Filipino workers; B6: Other
18 remaining workforce; and C: Rest of the Filipino population;²

19 WHEREAS, on 01 March 2021, the first COVID-19 vaccine in the country was
20 legally administered by nurse Charleuck Santos to Dr. Gerardo Legaspi, director of the
21 University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital (PGH). Along with Legaspi,
22 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Director General Eric Domingo, government
23 medical adviser Dr. Edsel Salvana, and vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. were also
24 vaccinated;³

25 WHEREAS, on 04 March 2021, the implementation of the government's
26 priority list was questioned when certain government officials drew criticisms after

¹ WHO-SAGE. 13 November 2020 *WHO SAGE ROADMAP FOR PRIORITIZING USES OF COVID-19 VACCINES IN THE CONTEXT OF LIMITED SUPPLY*. Retrieved last 29 March 2021 from: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/immunization/sage/covid/sage-prioritization-roadmap-covid19-vaccines.pdf>

² CNN Philippines Staff. (5 February 2021). *LIST: Priority sectors, subgroups in COVID-19 vaccination program*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/2/5/COVID-19-vaccination-priority-Philippines.html>

³ Tomacruz, S. (1 March 2021). *Philippines begins legally rolling out first COVID-19 vaccines*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/philippines-begins-legally-rolling-out-covid-19-vaccine-march-1-2021>

1 they were able to get vaccinated despite not being health care frontline workers.
2 Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque stated that some of these vaccinations were
3 done “in good faith” claiming he did not know about government vaccine experts’
4 decisions that all first shipments of vaccines must go to medical frontliners despite
5 being the one to publicly announce the government’s priority list barely a month
6 earlier;⁴

7 WHEREAS, on 18 March 2021, the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP)
8 announced that the IATF-EID had reclassified local chief executives to Category A4 or
9 “frontline personnel in essential sectors”. According to Bacolod City Mayor and LCP
10 National President Bing Leonardia, local chief executives are also frontliners in the
11 fight against the ongoing pandemic and further added that this development would
12 surely inspire and encourage local government leaders to work harder and more
13 effectively in the implementation of its COVID-19 programs;⁵

14 WHEREAS, on 23 March 2021, it was reported that the Philippines has only
15 been able to vaccinate about a quarter of its frontline health workers against COVID-
16 19. According to Sec. Galvez, at least 408,995 medical frontliners had been vaccinated,
17 representing merely 24 percent of the country’s around 1.7 million health workers;⁶

18 WHEREAS, DOH lamented reports of individuals and officials jumping the
19 queue. Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire expressed frustration and
20 disappointment, and said that “for every single dose that we get from them (healthcare
21 workers), we deprive healthcare workers of these dose for their protection...”;⁷

22 WHEREAS, despite having only a quarter of the country’s medical frontliners
23 vaccinated, it was revealed by President Duterte in a late-night meeting on 24 March
24 2021 that a handful of local chief executives were able to skip the vaccine line. He also

⁴ Ranada, P. (4 March 2021). *Malacañang: Vaccinations of officials, non-health workers were 'breaches' in protocol*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/malacanang-statement-vaccinations-officials-non-health-workers-breaches-protocol>

⁵ LCP Secretariat. (18 March 2021). *Local Chief Execs to be part of Priority Group for Vaccination – IATF*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://lcp.org.ph/11/572/local-chief-execs-to-be-part-of-priority-group-for-vaccination---latf>

⁶ ABS-CBN News. (23 March 2021). *Nearly one-fourth of Philippine health workers vaccinated vs COVID-19: official*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/23/21/nearly-one-fourth-of-philippine-health-workers-vaccinated-vs-covid-19-official>

⁷ ABS-CBN News. (26 March 2021) *'Nakakalungkot': DOH laments COVID-19 vaccine line-jumpers*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/26/21/nakakalungkot-doh-laments-covid-19-vaccine-line-jumpers>

1 said there were other officials, non-health workers, and even a child of a celebrity in a
2 list compiled by the government, but he declined to read the names publicly;⁸

3 WHEREAS, in a statement, Department of the Interior and Local Government
4 (DILG) officer in charge Bernardo Florece Jr. said five mayors who skipped the line
5 had been ordered to explain their actions and given three days to respond to the order.
6 The mayors said they had themselves inoculated to boost vaccine confidence among
7 their constituents;⁹

8 WHEREAS, Department of Health (DOH) Undersecretary Leopoldo Vega has
9 acknowledged that there are reports of individuals not on the COVID-19 vaccination
10 priority list who have jumped the queue to get vaccinated. He stated that while these
11 numbers are still insignificant, it was up to the National Task Force against COVID-19
12 and the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group to come up with penalties
13 for non-compliance with the priority list;¹⁰

14 WHEREAS, the World Health Organization (WHO) has also repeatedly warned
15 the government to ensure that requirements that have been agreed to and signed by
16 Philippine officials will be followed in order to secure future deliveries of vaccines
17 through the COVAX facility;¹¹

18 WHEREAS, Gavi, the vaccine alliance leading the global COVAX initiative
19 along with the WHO and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations,
20 explained that countries should follow the COVID-19 National Development
21 Vaccination Plan that they submitted. Any departure from such plan will have to be
22 investigated. In a statement, it said that “variations from the planned prioritization
23 would constitute misuse, unless updates to plans are shared with COVAX and are
24 documented, rationalized and evidence-based...” They also added that as a

⁸ Ranada, P. (24 March 2021). *Duterte wants 9 mayors to explain why they jumped vaccine line*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-wants-mayors-explain-why-they-jumped-covid-19-vaccine-line>

⁹ Cabalza, D. & Aning, J. (26 March 2021). *Duterte: Probe vaccine line-jumpers*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1411483/duterte-probe-vaccine-line-jumpers>

¹⁰ Gonzales, C. (22 March 2021). *Non-frontliners jumping COVID-19 vaccination queue — DOH official*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1409765/non-frontliners-jumping-covid-19-vaccination-queue-doh-official>

¹¹ Tan, L. & CNN Philippines (4 March 2021). *PH non-compliance to COVAX may 'jeopardize' allocated vaccines — WHO official*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/3/4/COVAX-vaccine-priority-list-WHO-Duterte.html?fbclid=IwAR0JeHCcG9C5XttXM4CVO2IfBhGMW2xj6KwrPRZ57DXcuHy3Edx38Mxdn1s>

1 consequence, “if misuse is determined, countries will be held to account and will be
2 required to reimburse COVAX”;¹²

3 WHEREAS, the insistence of local officials supposedly taking it upon
4 themselves to get vaccinated allegedly in order to boost vaccine confidence is a poor
5 excuse and is indicative of the failure of the national government to properly conduct
6 a vaccine information drive and monitor its systematic distribution which should have
7 formed part of their national vaccination program in the first place;

8 WHEREAS, leakages such as these only serve to undermine public confidence
9 in the vaccination program and the IATF-EID should be more transparent to the
10 public as to the methodology used to determine vaccination prioritization – including
11 explaining its reasons for granting A4 priority status to local chief executives – and put
12 in place measures that will ensure that these guidelines are strictly adhered to at every
13 level of government;

14 WHEREAS, the prioritization of vaccination is not without purpose. It is meant
15 to ensure that those in charge of saving lives should be protected as to save more lives.
16 To deprive them of the opportunity to be vaccinated early for political consideration
17 would be to endanger the lives for which our frontliners are responsible;

18 WHEREAS, with very scarce supply of COVID-19 vaccines, the State must
19 ensure that the line of priority is at all times respected. Any breach, whether committed
20 by authorities in their official capacity or by private individuals, must be dealt with to
21 the full extent of the law, to serve as a deterrent;

22 WHEREAS, public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must
23 be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty,
24 and efficiency. They must thus accord full respect to protocols and standards, and
25 serve as good examples to the public;

26 WHEREAS, serious consequences could arise from the breach of our
27 undertaking concerning these vaccines. The State must therefore not take this matter
28 sitting down. Stringent measures must be undertaken to ensure that the planned

¹² CNN Philippines. (26 March 2021) *PH would have to reimburse COVAX if vaccine priority line deemed violated*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/3/26/covax-philippines-vaccine-priority-line-.html?fbclid=IwAR0LMt5gCEWDzAPDTf8bVHmRclKE5wzmd-L9Td1h7IejvKyLkPYUf3dy8Kg>

1 prioritization is carried out. It must hold all violators accountable, and put
2 mechanisms in place so that future breaches would be curbed;

3 WHEREAS, there is a need to investigate how these local chief executives,
4 government officials, and private individuals were able to skip the line and get early
5 access to vaccines and determine who should be held liable for such oversight;

6 WHEREAS, there is a need to determine what went wrong with the national
7 government's COVID-19 vaccine information drive and distribution program given
8 that they saw it fit to accommodate the requests of local chief executives to be included
9 in the vaccine priority list despite the iNITAG's earlier rejection of the proposal to
10 reserve some vaccines for "influencers" to boost vaccine confidence;¹³

11 WHEREAS, there is also need to determine the status of the COVID-19
12 vaccination program in terms of how the national government plans on boosting
13 public confidence in the vaccines without having to delegate the task to local chief
14 executives in the first place;

15 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE, to urge the
16 appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the status
17 of the national government's COVID-19 vaccination program amid recent reports that
18 certain local chief executives, government officials and private individuals were able
19 to get vaccinated in violation of the prioritization protocol put in place to ensure timely
20 access for frontliners for the protection of the health sector and the COVID-19
21 response efforts.

Adopted,


HEILA M. DE LIMA

¹³ Ranada, P. (2 March 2021). *Gov't vaccination advisers reject giving '50 Influencers' Sinovac vaccine*. Retrieved 29 March 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/government-vaccination-advisers-reject-giving-influencers-sinovac-covid-19-vaccine>