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SENATE

P.S. RES. NO. 759

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Introduced by SENATOR SONNY ANGARA

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE CURRENT STATE OF COVID-19 BIOSURVEILLANCE AND GENOME SEQUENCING OF THE PHILIPPINES WITH THE END IN VIEW OF IMPROVING THE IDENTIFICATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF NEW COVID-19 VARIANTS THEREBY FURTHER STRENGTHENING THE COUNTRY'S RESPONSE TO THE ONGOING PANDEMIC

1 WHEREAS, genomic sequencing or surveillance, as defined by the United States
2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC), is a process that decodes the
3 composition of a virus, including COVID-19, to determine its characteristics and to
4 monitor the development of new variants over time providing vital information to
5 public health systems worldwide;

6 WHEREAS, genomic analysis and surveillance have performed a key role in
7 arresting previous viral outbreaks such as the Influenza A(H1N1), MERS-CoV, Ebola
8 disease, among others as it helped medical experts discover the origin, transmission,
9 and features of these viruses;

10 WHEREAS, recognizing the vital role of virus genome sequencing in efforts to
11 address the COVID-19 pandemic, the Africa Centres for Diseases Control and
12 Prevention and the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) have launched a network of
13 12 laboratories to reinforce genome sequencing of the COVID-19 virus in December
14 2020;

1 WHEREAS, the W.H.O. on January 8, 2021 emphasized the importance of
2 genomic sequencing in the global response against the COVID-19 pandemic as virus
3 genome sequences can be used to analyze outbreak dynamics, its spread, and
4 transmission routes that can help design diagnostic tests, drugs, and vaccines;

5 WHEREAS, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging
6 Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) issued Resolution No. 92 last January 5, 2021 to
7 establish the IATF Technical Working Group on COVID-19 Variants that is primarily
8 tasked to surveil the occurrence of new COVID-19 variants, and to provide policy
9 recommendations and the appropriate response against variants of concerns;

10 WHEREAS, the Department of Health (DOH) issued Department Memorandum
11 No. 2021-0128 last February 8, 2021 that set guidelines on routine biosurveillance for
12 COVID-19 to guide Philippine health institutions identify and monitor emerging
13 variants of concern;

14 WHEREAS, there is limited genome sequencing in the country with only 750
15 samples being evaluated per week, or less than 1 percent of the recorded cases
16 nationwide, which is below the ideal sequencing rate of 5 percent according to the
17 Philippine Genome Center (PGC);

18 WHEREAS, on 12 March 2021, the DOH reported that Regions V (Bicol), VIII
19 (Eastern Visayas), IX (Zamboanga Peninsula), and the Bangsamoro Autonomous
20 Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) are having difficulties in submitting COVID-19
21 samples for genome sequencing due to transportation issues and the lack of sufficient
22 laboratories;

23 WHEREAS, Filipino doctors and medical experts have expressed concern over
24 the low number of samples being sequenced and recommended that more laboratories
25 be utilized to augment the country's biosurveillance capacities on COVID-19 to ensure
26 that more contagious variants are immediately detected that is crucial to arrest rapid
27 transmission;

28 WHEREAS, new COVID-19 variants have caused a resurgence of infections in
29 many countries triggering a massive genomic research among international health
30 institutions to understand the variant's unique characteristics, its transmissibility, and
31 risk to certain population groups;

1 WHEREAS, the W.H.O. emphasized that the rapid generation and sharing of
2 virus genomic sequences provides vital information to the understanding of
3 transmission and to fine-tune clinical and epidemiological mitigation strategies;

4 WHEREAS, improvements to genome sequencing and biosurveillance would not
5 only strengthen the country's COVID-19 response, but would also be useful for other
6 outbreaks such as the African Swine Fever (ASF) and future epidemics;

7 NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED by the
8 Senate of the Philippines to conduct an inquiry on the current state of COVID-19
9 biosurveillance and genome sequencing in the Philippines to improve the identification
10 and classification of new COVID-19 variants thereby further strengthening the
11 country's COVID-19 response.

Adopted,



SONNY ANGARA