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FIRST REGULAR SESSION

PREPARED BY THE
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SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES

SESSION NO. 71
Wednesday, May 17, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:09 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Mark A. Villar led the prayer, to wit:

Today, as we gather here in this esteemed Chamber, I invite you to bow your heads and join me in a moment of prayer.

Almighty Creator, we come before You today with humble hearts, seeking Your guidance and wisdom as we engage in the important work of serving our nation.

Let it be Your will that we may be witnesses of Your divine plan as we all work hand in hand for peace, unity, and progress of our country.

May we be granted the clarity of thought and the eager heart to meet our duty for Your glory.

Allow Your grace to come upon us and take hold of us, so that we may serve the Filipino people according to Your will.

Bless the corners of this session hall, and we pray that it may be filled with Your Spirit.

May we always be mindful of the responsibility entrusted to us by the Filipino people and remain faithful to the ideals of justice, equality, and integrity.

We humbly acknowledge our sins and implore Your mercy and forgiveness. We lift up to You the Philippine Senate, the senators, the officials, the staff, the secretariat, and all those who work here.

We pray for Your divine hand to always be upon us, guiding our every thought and enlightening our every action.

Thank You for this opportunity that we can gather to fulfill our duty as legislators of the Philippines. May You give us guidance to carry wisdom, strength, and dedication to succeed in the things we will discuss today, and in the times to come.



Make us worthy of Your trust and the mission You have bestowed upon us. May integrity and uprightness govern all we endeavor so that all we do will prosper our country and our people.

We offer this prayer, seeking Your blessings upon this gathering and upon our beloved nation.

Pagpalain po Ninyo ang aming mahal na bansang Pilipinas at ang buong sambayanang Pilipino.

These we ask in Your Mighty Name. Amen.

ROLL CALL

Upon direction of the Senate President, the Secretary of the Senate, Atty. Renato N. Bantug Jr., called the roll, to which the following senators responded:

Angara, S.	Legarda, L.
Binay, M. L. N. S.	Marcos, I. R.
Cayetano, A. P. C. S.	Padilla, R. C.
Cayetano, P. S.	Pimentel III, A. K.
Dela Rosa, R. B. M.	Poe, G.
Ejercito, J. V. G.	Revilla Jr., R. B.
Estrada J. E.	Tulfo, R. T.
Gatchalian, W.	Villanueva, J.
Go, C. L. T.	Villar, C. A.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, M. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.

With 22 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

Senator Tolentino was on official mission abroad.

Senator Escudero was absent.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the Journal of Session No. 70 (May 16, 2023) and considered it approved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

Senator Villanueva acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the following guests:

- DBM Undersecretaries Leo Angelo M. Larcia and Joselito R. Basilio;
- Mayor Ian Gil Mendez of San Miguel, Bohol;
- Pastors of Jesus Is Lord (JIL) Church, namely: Daisy A. Quilates, Gladys Galang, and Cristy Calixtro;
- Sangguniang Bayan members from Gamu, Isabela, namely: Sheryl Labuanan, Rienabell Abalos, and Michelle Dalloran;
- Mayor Nilo M. Villanueva of Mabini, Batangas;
- Members of the IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP);
- Cedric Lee of Phil-Asia Group;
- Rico Gonzales;
- Canaan Lee; and
- Ferdinand Guerrero.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Letter from the House of Representatives, informing the Senate that on 15 May 2023, the House of Representatives passed the following House bills in which it requested the concurrence of the Senate:

House Bill No. 7909, entitled

AN ACT EXTENDING THE COVERAGE AND PERIOD OF AVAILMENT OF THE ESTATE TAX AMNESTY, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11213, AS AMENDED, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "TAX AMNESTY ACT"

To the Committee on Ways and Means

House Bill No. 7718, entitled

AN ACT REDEFINING THE CRIME OF ILLEGAL RECRUITMENT COMMITTED BY A SYNDICATE, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 442, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LABOR CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES, AS AMENDED, AND REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8042, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE MIGRANT WORKERS AND OVERSEAS FILIPINOS ACT OF 1995, AS AMENDED

To the Committee on Migrant Workers

House Bill No. 7721, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY FOR REHABILITATED DRUG DEPENDENTS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance

House Bill No. 7744, entitled

AN ACT ENHANCING THE CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FILIPINO PROFESSIONALS AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF CAREER PROGRESSION AND SPECIALIZATION PROGRAMS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10912, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2016"

To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Finance

House Bill No. 7763, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING AUGUST 9 OF EVERY YEAR AS THE PHILIPPINES-ISRAEL FRIENDSHIP DAY

To the Committees on Culture and the Arts; and Foreign Relations

House Bill No. 7755, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING IN THE CITY OF ANTIPOLO, PROVINCE OF RIZAL, A TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT CENTER, TO BE KNOWN AS THE ANTIPOLO CITY TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT CENTER, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance

House Bill No. 7756, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING IN THE CITY OF LIGAO, PROVINCE OF ALBAY, A TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT CENTER, TO BE KNOWN AS THE LIGAO CITY, ALBAY TESDA TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT CENTER, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance

House Bill No. 7752, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE METROPOLITAN BATAAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR

To the Committees on Local Government; Government Corporations and Public Enterprises; and Finance

and House Bill No. 7764, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SPECIAL DEFENSE ECONOMIC ZONE (SpeDEZ) INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT ARSENAL DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE LOCATED IN CAMP GEN. ANTONIO LUNA, LAMAO, MUNICIPALITY OF LIMAY, PROVINCE OF BATAAN, CREATING FOR THIS PURPOSE THE SPECIAL DEFENSE ECONOMIC ZONE AUTHORITY (SpeDEZA) AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

To the Committees on Economic Affairs; National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; Ways and Means; and Finance.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:16 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:24 p.m., the session was resumed.

Upon resumption, Senate President Zubiri explained that the reading of the Reference of Business had to be suspended because of the noise in one area of the session hall. He then reminded the Members of the Body to always observe proper decorum and the staff members and guests should listen attentively to the plenary proceedings while keeping their voices low. In this regard, he cited Rule III, Section 3(e) and (f) of the *Rules of the Senate* which provides that the Senate President has general control over the session hall, the antechambers, corridors and offices of the Senate, maintain order therein whenever there is disorder, and take appropriate measures to quell it.

He then requested the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms, General Ancan, to instruct the OSAA personnel to remind the guests and staff members to remain silent while the session is ongoing. Thereafter, he thanked Senate President Pro Tempore Legarda for reminding the Members to lead by example as elected leaders of the country.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

(Continuation)

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee Report No. 65, submitted by the Committee on Justice and Human Rights, on House Bill No. 7185, introduced by Representative Alonte, *et al.*, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO KYLE DOUGLAS JENNERMANN,

recommending its approval without amendment, taking into consideration Senate Bill No. 1500 and 1509.

Sponsor: Senator Tolentino

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

Committee Report No. 66, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Basic Education; Health and Demography; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2200, with Senators Gatchalian, Lapid, Go, Binay, Revilla, Jr., and Villanueva as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN BASIC EDUCATION BY INSTITUTIONALIZING A SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM, ESTABLISHING CARE CENTERS, PRESCRIBING THE CREATION OF NEW PLANTILLA POSITIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS AND MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 379 and 1795, taking into consideration House Bill No. 6574.

Sponsor: Senator Gatchalian

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS**BILLS ON FIRST READING**

Senate Bill No. 2186, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FRESH GRADUATES OF PHILIPPINE TERTIARY EDUCATION, UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS, OF A ONE-TIME CASH GRANT OF FIVE THOUSAND PESOS (PHP 5,000) WHICH THEY CAN UTILIZE FOR JOB APPLICATION, INITIAL EMPLOYMENT AND SETTLING-IN

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Youth; Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2187, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR FREE HEMODIALYSIS, PERITONEAL DIALYSIS, AND OTHER DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH APPROVED DIALYSIS PROCEDURES TO ALL SENIOR CITIZENS

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Health and Demography; Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2188, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING A PARCEL OF LAND LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF PRESIDENT MANUEL A. ROXAS, KATIPUNAN AND SLAYAN IN THE PROVINCE OF ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE, A PROTECTED AREA WITH THE CATEGORY OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPE UNDER THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM (NIPAS) TO BE REFERRED TO AS THE MT. GUTOM PROTECTED LANDSCAPE, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2189, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING A PARCEL OF LAND LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SULTAN NAGA DIMAPORO, IN THE PROVINCE OF LANAO DEL NORTE, A PROTECTED AREA WITH THE CATEGORY OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND SEASCAPE UNDER THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM, TO BE REFERRED TO AS THE SULTAN NAGA DIMAPORO PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND SEASCAPE, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2190, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING THE OLUTANGA ISLAND PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND SEASCAPE LOCATED IN THE PROVINCE OF ZAMBOANGA SIBUGAY AS A PROTECTED AREA, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2191, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR GERIATRIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, CREATING REGIONAL GERIATRIC SPECIALTY CENTERS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH-RETAINED HOSPITALS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Health and Demography; Ways and Means; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2192, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MAGNA CARTA OF COMMUTERS

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Public Services; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2193, entitled

AN ACT REDUCING THE RECOVERABLE SYSTEM LOSS RATE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Energy; and Public Services

Senate Bill No. 2194, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FILIPINO WOMEN AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality; Culture and the Arts; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2195, entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE MANDATE OF THE MOVIE AND TELEVISION REVIEW AND CLASSIFICATION BOARD, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 1986, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "CREATING THE MOVIE AND TELEVISIONS REVIEW AND CLASSIFICATION BOARD," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Public Information and Mass Media

Senate Bill No. 2196, entitled

AN ACT CONVERTING THE TAWI-TAWI REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BONGAO, PROVINCE OF TAWI-TAWI INTO A STATE COLLEGE TO BE KNOWN AS THE TAWI-TAWI STATE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Ways and Means; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2197, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11213, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "TAX AMNESTY ACT," AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11569, AND FURTHER EXTENDING THE PERIOD OF AVAILMENT OF ESTATE TAX AMNESTY

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

To the Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Bill No. 2198, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO ANY OFFICER OR ENLISTED PERSONNEL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP), PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE (PNP), BUREAU OF JAIL MANAGEMENT AND PENOLOGY (BJMP), AND THE PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD (PCG) ON ANY CHARGE BEFORE THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE, COURT OR ANY COMPETENT BODY ARISING FROM AN INCIDENT OR INCIDENTS RELATED TO THE PERFORMANCE OF OFFICIAL DUTY

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; Public Order and Dangerous Drugs; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2199, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TO USE BODY-WORN

CAMERAS DURING LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SPECIAL POLICE OPERATIONS, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2201, entitled

AN ACT PRESCRIBING THE USE OF NEO-ETHNIC PHILIPPINE TEXTILES IN THE ACADEMIC REGALIA OF ALL STATE AND LOCAL UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Binay

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Science and Technology; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2202, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING A PARCEL OF LAND LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF MARIA AURORA AND SAN LUIS IN THE PROVINCE OF AURORA AND IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BONGABON IN THE PROVINCE OF NUEVA ECIJA, A PROTECTED AREA WITH THE CATEGORY OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPE UNDER THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM, TO BE REFERRED TO AS THE AURORA MEMORIAL PROTECTED LANDSCAPE, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2203, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING MT. SAWTOOTH, LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF MAYANTOC AND SAN JOSE, PROVINCE OF TARLAC AS A PROTECTED AREA UNDER THE CATEGORY OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPE PURSUANT TO REPUBLIC ACT 7586 AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT 11038, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE EXPANDED NATIONAL INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM ACT OF 2018, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT, FUNDS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Ways and Means; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2204, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING A PARCEL OF LAND LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF POLANGUI AND OAS, AND CITIES OF LIGAO AND TABACO, IN THE

PROVINCE OF ALBAY, A PROTECTED AREA WITH THE CATEGORY OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPE UNDER THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM, TO BE REFERRED TO AS THE MT. MASARAGA PROTECTED LANDSCAPE, PROVIDING FOR ITS MANAGEMENT, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2205, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10845, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE ANTI-AGRICULTURAL SMUGGLING ACT OF 2016, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Hontiveros

To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Justice and Human Rights

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Joint Resolution No. 2, entitled

JOINT RESOLUTION INCREASING THE SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE OF ALL OFFICERS AND ENLISTED PERSONNEL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP) AND OF ALL COMMISSIONED AND NON-COMMISSIONED PERSONNEL OF THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE (PNP) FROM ONE HUNDRED FIFTY PESOS (P150) TO TWO HUNDRED FIFTY (P250) PESOS

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; Public Order and Dangerous Drugs; and Finance

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 615, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PROFOUND SYMPATHY AND SINCERE CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE ON THE DEATH OF REVERED STATESMAN FROM NUEVA VIZCAYA GOV. CARLOS PADILLA

Introduced by Senators Lapid and Escudero

To the Committee on Rules

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 66 on Senate Bill No. 2200 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 66 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2200 (Committee Report No. 66), entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN BASIC EDUCATION BY INSTITUTIONALIZING A SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM, ESTABLISHING CARE CENTERS, PRESCRIBING THE CREATION OF NEW PLANTILLA POSITIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS AND MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertions of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Gatchalian for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2200, Senator Gatchalian delivered the following speech:

It is an honor to stand before you today and introduce a landmark legislation that aims to confront a crucial concern in our basic education sector—the mental health problems plaguing our children and youth.

As I speak at this very moment, there are children and adolescents who are struggling with mental health. They wake up every morning finding it hard to get out of bed, battling anxiety and depression, feeling lost and alone. This reality poses a grave threat to their well-being, academic success and future.

Sa kasamaang-palad, marami pa rin sa atin ang hindi lubos na nakakaunawa sa usaping ito. Marami pa rin sa atin ang inaakalang simpleng tulog at pahinga lamang ang solusyon upang matugunan ito. At pinakamalala sa lahat, marami pa rin sa atin ang apektado ng suliraning ito ngunit bigong makahingi ng angkop ng propesyonal na tulong. Ika nga nila, ang mental health crisis ay isang “silent killer.”

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the mental health challenges faced by our youth. The pandemic has brought about unprecedented levels of stress uncertainty, anxiety, and fear, and the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus have made things even worse. With the closure of schools and the shift to online learning, learners have been isolated from their classmates, playmates, friends, teachers and mentors, leading to a sense of loneliness and detachment. As a result, the mental health and emotional well being of our youth have significantly been compromised.

In fact, in School Year 2021 to 2022, the number of learners who were reported to have committed suicide and attempted suicide is staggering. As schools nationwide opened after 375 days or 1.8 years of school closures, which is the longest in the world, figures from the Department of Education revealed that 2,147 learners attempted to commit suicide while 404 learners took their own lives.

Every life is precious, and one life lost is one too many. It is heartbreaking to know that in a single school year, over 400 learners ended their lives. Each one of them had his or her own aspirations and the potential to succeed in life. They could have landed their dream jobs, made groundbreaking discoveries, or could have become global advocates for mental health awareness.

In recent years, we have also witnessed disturbing incidences that demonstrate the impact of mental health problems on the Filipino youth. In October 2020, a 16-year old Grade 11 student from

the town of Tupi, South Cotabato committed suicide due to the pressure and difficulty of learning school modules. Prior to the incident, the learner reportedly complained to his mother that he could not answer the task in the learning modules, especially in Mathematics.

In January of this year, we also heard the news of a 13-year old student who tragically lost his life after being stabbed by his 15-year old classmate. It is heartbreaking to learn that the suspect claimed, the victim had been bullying other students.

These events serve as a stark reminder of the pressing need to prioritize mental health in our schools. Mental health issues can have a significant impact on the development of our learners, leading to poor academic performance, concentration difficulty, poor social relationships, and in extreme cases, suicidal tendencies.

This is also the reason why the World Health Organization recognizes the critical role of schools as primary mental health support system for students by enabling the planning and implementation of a broad spectrum of mental health actions that encompass promotion, prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation.

It is essential to note that Republic Act No. 11036, also known as the Mental Health Act, clearly defines the role of the Department of Education in the execution and implementation of mental health promotion in educational institutions. Apparently, the DepEd revised the School Safety Assessment Tool (SSAT) to mobilize and prepare the school for the safe, effective, and efficient conduct of the progressive expansion of face-to-face learning. One of the main areas of SSAT is the well-being and protection where schools are mandated to maintain the provision of basic mental health services and psychosocial support to ensure that well-being and protection of our learners.

Furthermore, the DepEd has recognized the importance of guidance counselors in schools. According to Department Order No. 77, series of 2010, based on DepEd-DBM Organization and Staffing Standards, there should be one guidance counselor for every 500 learners at the secondary level.

However, with 23.98 million basic education learners for School Year 2022-2023, the country is facing a significant shortage. As of February 2023, there are only 1,180 guidance counselors in DepEd. This means that for learners in junior high school and senior high school, on average, DepEd has one guidance counselor for every 8,431 learners. If we include elementary learners, this ratio increases to one guidance counselor available for every 20,319 learners on average.

The shortage of guidance counselors is not the only challenge faced by the DepEd. The education sector also struggles to attract highly qualified guidance counselors due to low compensation. In Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms, the starting salary of guidance counselors in the Philippines is one of the lowest. For comparison, guidance counselors in the USA may earn an estimated monthly salary of P78,807, which is more than double once we compare it to the P27,000 monthly salary earned by each of our own guidance counselors.

This reality is unacceptable. Our guidance counselors deserve better. Our Filipino learners deserve better. Our Filipino learners deserve to have access to proper mental health care support and guidance. They deserve a safe and nurturing learning environment that promotes their mental health and well-being. Given this context, it is my privilege and honor to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2200, otherwise known as the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotions Act.

This proposed measure institutionalizes the School-Based Mental Health Program to promote and ensure the mental health and well-being of all learners in public and private basic education schools across the country. The program will define the role of every stakeholder in the school committee and appropriately respond to mental health concerns through prevention, intervention, postvention, and recovery. It will be developed in consultation with learners, their parents and parents-substitute, and implemented by the DepEd.

The program will provide essential school-based mental health services, including screening, evaluation, assessment and monitoring, mental health first aid, crisis response and referral system, mental health and literacy, emotional development and preventive programs, and other support services, such as strengthening the learner's family bonds. Moreover, the DepEd will implement complementary measures that enable other associated healthy behaviors among learners and

eliminate the stigma of mental health counselling. It will also provide mental health awareness programs and literacy and appropriate mental health-related referrals to teaching and non-teaching personnel.

The cornerstone of this legislation is the establishment of a care center in every public basic education school in the country and ensuring their establishment and maintenance in private schools. The Center will be equipped with functional fiscal facilities located within an adequate space where confidentiality is maintained and accessible to learners, teachers, and nonteaching personnel.

Specifically, the Center will serve as an instrument to deliver school-based mental health services, including the development of a localized multi-year roadmap on the School-Based Mental Health Program, improvement of the mental health awareness and literacy of the teaching and nonteaching personnel, and establishment of linkages with the school committee including parents, parents substitutes, LGUs, and other stakeholders. Moreover, the establishment of the care center will also be a key to equip the learners with skills and information for prevention, identification, and proper response and referral for their own and others' mental health needs.

This landmark legislation will also pave the way to hire and capacitate competent personnel whose duties and responsibilities shall be geared towards promoting and ensuring the mental health and well-being of all learners and promote their professional growth and career progression by prescribing the creation of new plantilla positions of Mental Health Specialist and Mental Health Associates in the DepEd.

The new plantilla positions of the Mental Health Specialist I to V and Mental Health Associate I to V will be created in the DepEd. All existing plantilla positions of guidance counselors and psychologists in the DepEd shall be converted to Mental Health Specialist plantilla positions and their corresponding salary grades will be adjusted in accordance with the salary schedule prescribed in this Act. Specifically, the compensation of the existing plantilla positions of Guidance Counselors I to III and Psychologist I to III will be adjusted to Salary Grades 16, 18, and 20 as their positions are converted to Mental Health Specialist I to III. To ensure their career progression, they can be promoted to Mental Health Specialist IV and V with Salary Grades 22 and 24, respectively.

The creation of these new plantilla positions will address the current shortage of guidance counselors in our basic education institutions. By creating more positions, we can guarantee that our learners will have access to mental health services they need.

As policymakers of our nation, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye on this issue any longer. It affects the progress and well-being of our learners and even our society.

Sa pagpasa ng batas na ito, mas lalo nating binibigyang diin ang pagkilala sa ating mga paaralan bilang pangalawang tahanan ng mga mag-aaral, hindi lamang sa paglinang ng kanilang mga kaalaman at kahusayan, kundi maging sa pangangalaga sa kalusugan ng pag-iisip.

To the youth who are suffering silently and bearing the weight of their mental health struggles, please know that you are not alone. You are not weak for struggling with mental health issues. You are brave and strong for facing these challenges head on. You are worthy of love and support no matter what.

I want to remind you that even K-pop artists, who are often idolized as flawless and perfect individuals, are not immune to mental health struggles. One heartbreaking example is Jonghyun, a member of the group SHINee, who tragically took his own life in 2017. Prior to his passing, he had bravely spoken about his battle with depression. In a note made public, a day after his death, the 27-year old expressed feeling deeply broken from inside.

In 2019, Sulli, a former member of K-pop f(x), also ended her life. She was known for her outspokenness regarding mental health issues, cyberbullying, and women's rights. Unfortunately, her advocacies subjected her to intense scrutiny and online backlash.

These incidents tell us one thing: It is crucial to acknowledge that mental health issues can affect any one regardless of their profession or fame. Both Jonghyun and Sulli gave representation to those who suffer from mental health issues. Their narratives highlight the importance of addressing mental health issues in the entertainment industry and beyond.

By passing and implementing this proposed measure, we increase awareness among young people that seeking help from mental health specialist and associates is always an available option within their learning community. This can encourage more youth to seek support and guidance whenever they need it in promoting their overall well-being.

In closing, I express my heartfelt appreciation to our esteemed colleagues who coauthored this bill: Majority Leader Sen. Joel Villanueva, Sen. Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay, Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, Sen. Manuel "Lito" M. Lapid, and Sen. Ramon Bong Revilla Jr. I also extend my gratitude to the numerous stakeholders who participated rigorously in this bill's legislative process. Their unwavering support, invaluable input, and active participation in the public hearings and in the technical working group sessions have been the driving force behind the crafting of this substitute bill. Their invaluable support and contributions have been instrumental in making this bill a reality.

We cannot continue to allow our learners to suffer in silence. It is up to us to create a world where mental health is valued—where those who are struggling are not judged or dismissed, but embraced with understanding and care. We owe it to our children to provide them with an education that is not only academically-driven, but also mentally and emotionally enriching. Only then can we truly say that we are providing our learners with quality education.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2200, Senators Villanueva, Hontiveros, and Go delivered the following speeches:

By Senator Villanueva

It is my great honor and privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2200 under Committee Report No. 66, institutionalizing the School-Based Mental Health Program to promote and ensure the mental health and emotional well-being of all learners in public and private basic education schools. Again, for the record, we would like to thank in full gratitude and commend our sponsor—our seatmate, our brother—Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, for his hard work on this very important piece of legislation.

During the committee hearing on this measure, it was revealed that 404 students in various parts of the country committed suicide, and 2,147 others attempted to take their own lives during the School Year 2021 to 2022, as most schools were still closed due to the pandemic. *Napakasakit pong pakinggan at marinig ang mga datos na ibinigay po sa atin.*

Five years ago, we passed the Mental Health Act with the hope that we will finally address the concerns of our fellow Filipinos who are in dire need of accessible mental health care. As one of the authors of the landmark law, we pushed for the inclusion of mechanisms for suicide prevention, among others, with attention to the concerns of the youth, considering that the youth is among the age group that is particularly vulnerable to extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors.

This is reflected in the 2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study led by University of the Philippines Population Institute, which found that close to one in five Filipino youth, aged 15 to 24, has considered ending their life.

Kaya naman po kasabay ng panawagan para sa full implementation ng Mental Health Act ay ang pagbibigay po natin ng buong suporta ng pagsasabatas ng Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act.

The School-Based Mental Health Program that will be institutionalized under this measure will help promote mental health awareness and manage the mental health concerns of all learners, including the prevention of suicide in schools. School-based mental health services, including screening, evaluation, assessment, and monitoring, mental health first aid, crisis response and referral system, emotional, developmental, and preventive programs, and other support services will also be provided to our learners.

It is our fervent hope that, with the passage of this particular measure, the youth will finally have enough support system that will help foster their mental, emotional, and overall health and

well-being. We also hope and pray that the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health will finally be removed with these policies and programs in place.

Muli, maraming salamat. Maraming salamat sa ating sponsor at mga kasamahan dito sa Senado.

By Senator Hontiveros

I would like to express my gratitude to Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian and our other colleagues, including the Majority Leader, for putting forward the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act, or Senate Bill No. 2200, for consideration.

I fully support the proposal and believe that it will greatly enhance the mental health programs in schools as well as further strengthen our existing Mental Health Act, or RA 11036.

I believe that the proposal will effectively provide the much-needed support for mental health services by developing a localized, multi-year roadmap on the School-Based Mental Health Program, by establishing care centers, and by creating plantilla positions for mental health specialists and psychologists.

Together with the sponsor and our other colleagues, I am committed to working toward the progressive realization of the promotion and maintenance of mental health and wellness in basic education. That being the case, I would be grateful to be made coauthor and cosponsor of the bill.

By Senator Go

As chairman of the Committee on Health and Demography and coauthor of this measure, it is my honor to cosponsor the proposed Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act.

As we strive for progress and development, we must recognize the importance of prioritizing mental health in the lives of our young learners. Basic education forms the foundation upon which the future of our nation is built. It equips the youth with knowledge, skills, and values, empowering them to become responsible citizens and contributors to society. However, the well-being of our students should not be overlooked in this pursuit of academic excellence. *Hindi po dapat pabayaang ang mental health, lalo na iyong sa mga kabataan.* We must acknowledge the inseparable connection between education and mental health, as a child cannot thrive academically if their mental well-being is compromised.

Even before the pandemic, former President Rodrigo Duterte and I have always supported measures promoting the mental health of our Filipino people. In fact, in 2018, he signed the Philippine Mental Health Bill into law to ensure that mental health care services are more accessible to everyone; but, as discussed with the Department of Health, much has to be done to fulfill the goals of the law.

In the Philippines alone, we face various challenges when it comes to mental health in the education system. According to a World Health Organization study in 2007, 16% of Filipino children had mental disorders, and this figure could be more in the present.

In the Committee on Health hearing last week, I raised that according to the DepEd, a total of 404 learners from public schools committed suicide in 2021; and 2,147 learners attempted suicide. We cannot deny the fact that many of our youth have suffered from depression and experienced mental challenges during the pandemic.

Mental health is important, and the pressing issue concerning it is alarming. Even during the first few months of the pandemic, *marami pong mga kababayan natin ang naka-experience ng depression; marami ang nagpakamatay sa mga quarantine facilities.* Not only students, *mga OFW ay talagang nakaka-experience ng depression. Marami pong apektado sa panahon ng pandemya. Napakahirap talaga nitong problema ng pandemya, apektado talaga ang ating mental health.*

As policymakers, it is our collective duty to recognize these challenges and take proactive measures to promote mental health within the education system. As we have now brought back face-to-face learning, the school serves as the second home of our youth. Having a safe space where they could get proper guidance and counseling would be an effective approach to reach out to them and alleviate the challenges they are personally dealing with.

If this bill is passed into law, a care center in basic education schools will be established. This will not only benefit the students but also the teaching and non-teaching personnel. *Magiging bukas po ito para sa lahat ng mga nangangailangan, iyong may mga kailangan.*

In fact, I also filed Senate Bill No. 1786, which mandates public higher education institutions to establish mental health offices, *dahil importante po na magkaroon tayo ng available mental health care services sa basic education at higher education.* As chairperson of the Committee on Health and Demography, I believe that physical, emotional, and mental health are all equally important, and I will continue to support measures that would protect and promote the different aspects of health as a whole.

I thank and congratulate the chairperson of the Committee on Basic Education, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, for prioritizing this very, very important measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Senator Villanueva manifested that the following senators submitted their cosponsorship speeches on Senate Bill No. 2200 for insertion into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Legarda

Esteemed colleagues, I stand before you to advocate for the passing of Senate Bill No. 2200 under Committee Report No. 66, or the "Basic Education Mental Health and Well Being Promotion Act."

1. Mental health is a critical issue that has long been neglected in our country. Although progress has been made in recent years, it is clear that there is still much work to be done to ensure that all Filipinos have access to the care they need. As we move forward, we must prioritize the mental health of our youth, especially those in basic education.
2. As we continue to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must recognize the impact it has had on the mental health of our youth. Many students are struggling with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, and it is our responsibility to provide them with the support and care they need to cope and thrive.
3. This bill seeks to institutionalize a school-based mental health program, which will ensure that every student has access to the care and support they need to maintain good mental health. This will allow students to receive the help they need in a safe environment without fear of stigma or discrimination.
4. To support this program, the bill also prescribes the creation of new plantilla positions of mental health specialists and mental health associates. With their expertise, we can ensure that our youth receives the best possible care and support to maintain good mental health.
5. We must acknowledge that mental health is just as important as physical health. I urge all of us to prioritize the mental health of our youth and support the passing of this measure. Let us work together towards a future where mental health is treated with the same importance as physical health and where our youth can achieve their full potential.
6. With this, I would like to be made a co-author of this measure.

By Senator Revilla

I commend our education reform champion, Sen. Win Gatchalian, for taking a proactive stand to address this creeping mental health pandemic in our schools.

We are at the crossroads of the surge in mental health cases in the country. *Ang pandemya ay nagdulot ng matinding stress, takot, at pagkabalisa. Nakababahala ang bilang ng mga reported suicide cases ng ating mga kabataang mag-aaral. Mabigat din sa ating kalooban ang kasalukuyang kalagayan ng kakayahan ng ating mga paaralan na tumugon sa mental health needs ng ating mga mag-aaral at guro.*

It is an understatement to claim that a full-blown disaster is about to happen. *Alam natin na hindi lamang ito ordinaryong sakit na kaya ng tulong, kain, o di kaya paracetamol. May malalim*

itong sanhi na nangangailangan ng akmang lunas. Lunas na, nawa, ay abot-kamay sa ating mga paaralan.

Hangad nating matugunan ito bago pa ito tuluyang lumubha. Ang ating mga paaralan ay nararapat na manatiling ligtas na espasyo para sa bawat mag-aaral at guro. Sa gitna ng kanilang takot at agam-agam, ang panawagan ay magsilbi tayong sandigan. Walang buhay ang dapat singilin ng matinding lumbay. Nakikiisa tayo sa pagbuo ng mga posibleng solusyon.

I am one with the continuing call for a holistic approach in ensuring the welfare of our school communities. Indeed, no Filipino child should be left behind.

By Senator Dela Rosa

I stand here today to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2200, or the “Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act,” under Committee Report No. 66, which promotes mental health and well-being in and among our children.

As I listened to the statistics mentioned by Senator Gatchalian, on how many of our young learners have attempted and committed suicide, I was heartbroken. My heart grieves for the young lives that were lost—children who could have reached milestones, if only they managed to beat the invisible enemy in the battles they fought silently. There are many “could-have-beens” and “should-have-beens,” especially for those who lost their loved ones from these mental health problems.

In this present circumstance where we already see the increasing number of victims that mental illness has taken, we must take action. We must support the system of our basic education, specifically toward beating the mental illness that is slowly eating at our children’s future.

I came across a quote from Germany Kent that speaks volumes about this, and it states: “Be dedicated to change the way in which people see mental illness at all levels of society. If not for yourself, advocate for those who are struggling in silence.”

We are here as senators and advocates against anything that endangers the future of this nation, the future of our loved ones, and the future of our children.

I am moved by this measure, and I support such a wonderful bill as it aims to equip our children with the needed tools—both to believe in themselves, and to believe that their lives are worth living.

By Senator Angara

Tayo po ay muling tumatayo sa bulwagang ito, upang sumuporta sa agarang pagpasa ng isang panukala na naglalayong gawing bahagi ng ating basic education ang isang epektibo at mahusay na school-based mental health program.

Napakaganda po ng layuning ito ng ating kaibigan at kasamahan na si Senator Win Gatchalian, sapagkat hindi lang ang mga aktibong learners mula sa pampubliko at pribadong paaralan ang sakop ng panukalang ito, kundi maging ang mga Out-of-School Children in Special Cases, base sa itinatadhana ng RA 11510 o ang Alternative Learning System Act.

Hindi po dapat nasasayang ang kahalagahan ng ating kabataan dahil sa mga suliraning pangkaisipan. Kailangan po nila ng paggabay, atensyon at tulong upang habang maaga ay maisalba sila sa panganib dulot ng ganitong uri ng problema. Sila ang susunod na henerasyon ng mga pinuno kaya’t iligtas natin sila mula sa samu’t saring epekto ng suliranin sa pag-iisip.

Ito po ang dahilan kung bakit solido ang ating pagsuporta sa panukalang ito ni Senator Win Gatchalian – ang maakay sa tamang kaisipan ang ating kabataan, lalo na ang ating mga mag-aaral na pangunahing dumaranas ng mental problems.

Isa sa mahahalagang nilalaman ng panukala ang iligtas ang mga mag-aaral mula sa posibleng pagpapatiwakal, sanhi ng ‘di kinakayang school pressure at kung anu-ano pang suliranin na nagpapatindi sa kanilang bagsak na emosyon.

Kung maalala po ninyo, Pebrero ngayong taon, sa isang pagdinig ng Senate Committee on basic education ni Senator Win, nagpahayag si DepEd Asec Dexter Galban na noong 2021, sa kasagsagan ng pandemya, umabot sa mahigit apat na raan (400) ang mga public school learners

na nagpakamatay. Liban pa po riyang mahigit dalawang libong (2,000) mag-aaral na nagtangkang magpaliwanag, gayundin ang mahigit 700,000 students na sumailalim sa guidance counselling.

Nakabababala po ang datos na ito. Isang bata nga lamang po ang mabalitaan nating kumitil ng sariling buhay ay nakalulungkot na, paano pa kaya ang daan-daan o libu-libo sa kanila na hindi kinakaya ang problema sa paaralan at iba pang personal na suliranin?

Malaking bagay din po na kung sakaling maisabatas ang panukalang ito ay magkaroon tayo ng Care Center na pamumunuan ng isang Mental Health specialist, kaagapay ang isang Mental Health Associate sa bawat public basic education school, gayundin sa mga pribadong paaralan.

Kung meron tayong Care Center, ayon nga sa panukala ay magkakaroon din tayo ng localized multi-year school-based mental health program. Sa pamamagitan nito, mas malaki ang posibilidad na mas maliwanagan ang ating mga mag-aaral, at mawaksi sa kanilang kaisipan ang mga negatibong bagay.

Maging ang mga teaching and non-teaching personnel ay matutulungan na mas mahulma ang kanilang mental health awareness at literacy, upang mas madali nilang makalkula kung ang isang mag-aaral ay nagdaranas ng suliranin sa pag-iisip. Sa pamamagitan nito, malaki ang tsansa na mailigtas ang concerned students mula sa posibleng pagpaliwanag o pananakit sa sarili.

Suportado rin po natin ang nilalayan ng panukala na kilalanin ang kahalagahan ng mga Guidance Counselors at Psychologists.

Dahil base pa rin po sa naging pahayag ni Asec. Galban sa nabanggit nating pagdinig noong Pebrero, isa rin sa mga problema ng ating guidance counsellors ang kanilang sweldo. Pero kung sakali pong maisabatas ang panukalang ito, malilikha ang mga posisyong Mental Health Specialists I to V at Mental Health Associates I to V na magiging plantilla positions sa Department of Education. At dahil gagawing Mental Health Specialists plantilla positions ang ating guidance counsellors mai-a-adjust din ang kanilang sahod sa naaayong salary schedule.

Hindi po biro ang trabaho ng ating guidance counsellors. Dahil sa kakulangan ng kanilang bilang, hindi naaabot ang ideal ratio na 1:250. Lumalabas na upang masustina ang pangangailangan ng mga paaralan sa counsellors, nagiging 1:500 ang sistema. Kaya, malaking bagay po na matulungan sila ng departamento kahit man lang sa implementasyon ng kanilang salary schedule.

Napakaganda po ng mga nilalaman ng panukalang ito. Kapakanan ng mga mag-aaral, ng mga kabataan at ang pagsalba sa kanila mula sa depresyon ang pangunahing tinututukan nito, kaya't sana ay maipasa na natin ito sa lalong madaling panahon.

COAUTHORS AND COSPONSORS

Upon his request, Senator Dela Rosa was made coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 2200.

Senate President Zubiri was also made coauthor of the bill upon his request.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SECOND ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 2206, entitled

AN ACT BANNING THE IMPORTATION OF SOLID WASTE

Introduced by Senator Pimentel III

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2207, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING ARTICLE 90 OF ACT NO. 3815, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE REVISED PENAL CODE, AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Pimentel III

To the Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 2208, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE NATIONAL MAPPING AND RESOURCE INFORMATION AUTHORITY (NAMRIA), AMENDING CERTAIN PORTIONS OF EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 192, SECTION 22(a) AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2209, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING ALL RESTAURANTS, HOTELS, INNS, FASTFOOD CENTERS, EATERIES AND SIMILAR ESTABLISHMENTS TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF DRINKING PLASTIC STRAWS AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATION

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2210, entitled

AN ACT BANNING THE IMPORTATION OF SOLID WASTE

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2211, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING THE MONTH OF JUNE OF EVERY YEAR AS THE
'MARINE TURTLE AWARENESS MONTH'

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Report No. 67, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Health and Demography; Ways and Means; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2212, with Senators Zubiri, Angara, Ejercito, Cayetano (P), Estrada, Marcos, Go, Padilla, Gatchalian, and Escudero as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SPECIALTY CENTERS IN HOSPITALS UNDER THE
DIRECT SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 80, 93, 161, 249, 807, 1263, 1267, 1321, 1361, 1362, 1752, and 2065.

Sponsor: Senator Go

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 67 on Senate Bill No. 2212 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 67 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2212

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2212 (Committee Report No. 67), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SPECIALTY CENTERS IN HOSPITALS UNDER THE
DIRECT SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri relinquished the Chair to Senator Gatchalian.

The Chair recognized Senator Go for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

Senator Go, on behalf of the Committee on Health and Demography, submitted for plenary consideration Senate Bill No. 2212, entitled "An Act Establishing Specialty Centers in Hospitals

under the Direct Supervision and Control of the Department of Health and Appropriating Funds therefor,” under Committee Report No. 67.

Following is the full text of Senator Go’s sponsorship speech:

I rise to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2212 under Committee Report No. 67, establishing Regional Specialty Centers nationwide.

Republic Act No. 11223, or the Universal Healthcare Act, aims to ensure that all Filipinos are guaranteed equitable access to quality and affordable health services. The law mandates the efficient delivery of coordinated and continuous healthcare from primary to tertiary level, with linkages to an apex and referral hospital or other facilities providing specialized services needed by its catchment population.

While the government has consistently strive to improve medical access, the reality remains that access to hospitals providing specialized healthcare services is still limited. Almost all specialty hospitals are located in Metro Manila. We have here the Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center of the Philippines, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, and the Philippine Children’s Medical Center, among others. These specialty hospitals are some of the best in our country. They provide quality and affordable healthcare. *Sila ang may sapat na kagamitan, karanasan, mga doktor, teknolohiya at expertise. Sila rin ang madalas puntahan ng mga medical practitioner. Kaya naman karamihan sa ating mga kababayan na may malubhang sakit mula sa iba’t-ibang parte ng ating bansa ay gustong magpagamot sa mga specialty centers sa Maynila. Marami sa kanila ang namamasaha at pumupunta pa ng Maynila. Dagdag pa sa isipin nila ang transportasyon. Problema pa nila kung saan sila tutuloy habang nandito sila sa Metro Manila. Nandiyan din ang mataas na presyo ng bilingin kumpara sa kanilang mga probinsiya.*

Lahat ng ito ay dagdag na pasanin ng ating mga kababayan. Bago nila maisip kung gagaling ba ang kanilang pasyente, kadalasan ay nauuna pang isipin at pinoproblema ang magiging gastos sa pagpunta sa Metro Manila. Ang iba po ay ayaw na magpagamot dahil takot sa babayaran sa ospital; kaya namamatay na lamang sila. At kawawa iyong mga mahihirap na walang kakayahan na magpagamot dito sa mga specialty hospital.

We need to make these specialized medical services available to our people in the provinces. We must unburden our people of unnecessary long travels and additional expenses just to get these services. After all, it is enshrined in our Constitution as a matter of state policy that the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people, and that the State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development, which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health, and other social services available to all the people at affordable cost.

As elected representatives of the Filipino people, it is our solemn duty to realize these state policies, and passing this bill will not only protect and promote such right, but make this as a living testament of the collective desire of the Nineteenth Congress to help provide more comfortable lives for Filipinos.

Hindi po dapat mahirapan ang ating mga kababayan na maka-access sa serbisyo ng gobyerno, lalo na pagdating sa usaping kalusugan. Tayo po ang dapat maglapit ng serbisyo ng gobyerno sa tao. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit ko po isinulong ang mga Malasakit Centers para ang gobyerno po ang lumapit sa mga tao, lalong-lalo na po iyong mga mahihirap.

This is in line with the pronouncement of Pres. Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. in his first State of the Nation Address. *Sabi niya, “Napapakinabangan natin nang husto ang mga malalaking specialty hospitals gaya ng Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center of the Philippines, National Children’s Hospital, at National Kidney and Transplant Institute.” Kaya maliwanag na hindi lamang dapat dito sa NCR kung hindi maging sa ibang parte ng bansa kailangang magdagdag ng ganitong uri ng pagamutan.*

The establishment of specialty centers is among the health-related legislative agenda contained in the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028 signed by Pres. Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

Sumasang-ayon po ako kay Pangulong Marcos na hindi lamang sa Metro Manila ang may sakit sa puso o baga. Sa pag-iikot ko po sa iba’t ibang parte ng bansa, napakarami ng lumalapit sa akin hindi lamang sa pagpapagamot. May iba na humihingi ng pamasaha para lamang

bumiyahe sa Maynila kasi nandirito po ang kumpletong hospital na kayang gumamot sa kanila. Kailangan nating ilapit sa ating mga kababayan ang mga specialty hospital. Sa pagkakaroon ng dagdag na mga specialty hospital maging sa labas ng Metro Manila, hindi na mahihirapan ang mga Pilipino kahit nasaan man silang sulok ng bansa dahil mapapalapit sa kanila ang specialty hospitals.

This is also a way to decongest our specialty hospitals in Metro Manila. For instance, the establishment of mental health centers in various DOH hospitals would help decongest the National Center for Mental Health. *Napakasikip na po diyan sa Mandaluyong.*

During the committee hearing, it was unanimously recommended by the DOH and the specialty hospitals that the establishment of specialty centers in existing DOH hospitals—*sa mga regional hospitals*—is more cost-efficient, practical, and time-saving considering that the healthcare experts in the regions and other personnel are already available and accessible in these hospitals.

Further, the infrastructure and equipment will just have to be upgraded and complemented as compared to constructing totally new specialty hospitals. This direction is in line with the department order issued by the Department of Health in 2021, designating selected DOH hospitals as specialty centers.

While the policy is already provided, such order serves only as a guide for the DOH and its hospitals. Legislative mandate is needed to ensure continuous funding and to guarantee that the establishment of specialty centers in DOH hospitals will be prioritized by the government. The substitute bill is a consolidation of the different proposals relating to specialty hospitals and centers. No less than Senate President Juan Miguel F. Zubiri serves as the principal author of the bill. We also have Sen. Sonny Angara, Sen. Joseph Victor “JV” G. Ejercito, Sen. Francis G. Escudero, Sen. Pia Cayetano, Sen. Jinggoy Ejercito Estrada, Sen. Imee Marcos, Sen. Robinhood Padilla, Sen. Win Gatchalian, and this Representation as authors. Sen. Ramon Bong Revilla also signified his interest to coauthor the measure and also Sen. Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa.

This proposed measure mandates the DOH to establish specialty centers in identified DOH hospitals in every region. Within five years, the DOH shall establish at least one specialty center in every region with a particular focus on establishing heart, lung, and kidney centers, which shall replicate the capabilities of the national specialty centers in Metro Manila.

The criteria for the establishment of specialty centers are also provided, such as evidence of the health needs and demands in the catchment population, geographic, and physical access to the hospital, role of the DOH hospitals as referral for healthcare provider networks, availability of competent health human resources for specialized health care, and operational and financial performance of the DOH hospital.

The Department of Health, in coordination with the National Specialty Centers, shall ensure that the specialty centers in DOH hospitals have expert personnel and medical specialists provided with necessary training and appropriate specialist equipment. The DOH is also required to include capital outlay investments for designated specialty centers through the Health Facilities Enhancement Program and shall coordinate with the Department of Budget and Management in the development of the staffing pattern and standards for specialty centers. This is to ensure that plantilla positions shall be available for the healthcare workers serving in specialty centers.

The bill also defines the roles of the specialty centers and shall authorize them to contract the services of individuals deemed as medical specialists or experts to provide specialty training and technical assistance to specialty centers.

Specialty centers may also send personnel to the National Specialty Centers for training and capacity development. An initial budget of more than P8.6 billion has been included in the 2023 budget, and through this legislation, we aim to sustain its funding.

It is our hope that the establishment of specialty centers would strengthen our healthcare system and make specialized health services available and accessible to all Filipinos in line with our vision of universal healthcare. It is time that we invest in health. *Kung tutuusin, pera po ito ng Pilipino, ibalik natin sa kanila sa pamamagitan ng mas madaling malalapitan at maayos na serbisyo. Ilapit natin ang serbisyo medikal sa ating mga kababayan, lalong-lalo na po iyong mga mahihirap nating kababayan.*

With that, I request this Chamber’s support for the immediate passage of this measure.



COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2212, Senate President Zubiri delivered the following speech:

I am very happy to stand here today to cosponsor this important measure, *na matagal ko na pong pinapangarap na maipasa para sa ating mga kababayan. Alam po ni Presiding Officer po iyan, Senator Gatchalian, in our campaign in the 2022 national elections. Bukambibig ng lahat ng speech ko po ay i-expand ang ating specialty hospitals all around the Philippines.*

Bilang taga-Mindanao, like our Minority Leader, and like our sponsor, Senator Go, talagang priority ko po itong Regional Specialty Centers Act, dahil alam ko pong hirap na hirap ang ating mga kababayan sa mga probinsiya na makakuha ng specialized medical care mula sa mga specialty hospitals natin, gaya ng Philippine Children's Medical Center, Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center of the Philippines, and National Kidney and Transplant Institute, na lahat po ay dito sa Metro Manila, particularly in Quezon City.

While we do have specialty centers in some of our provinces, few are equipped to offer the same level of services that our national specialty hospitals do. So, *kung taga-probinsiya ka at kailangan mo ng high-level specialized care, dalawa lang ang puwede mong gawin: lumuwas pa-Maynila, o magpunta sa private hospital. Either way, malaking gastos ito.*

Kung luluwas ka man, hindi lang transportasyon ang gastusin diyan, pati accommodation. At kadalasan, aside from the patient, mayroon din pong kasamang family member or two to assist the patient, lalo na kung senior citizen, o PWD, o malala ang karamdaman ng pasyente. Ending po niyan, doble ang gastos ng pasyente at ng pamilya.

At kung wala kang pamasaha para makaluwas sa Maynila, siguradong wala ka ring pang-private hospital na pambayad. This is the reality of millions of Filipinos. Kaya hindi na po nakapagtataka kung bakit marami sa mga kababayan natin ang pinipili na lamang na hindi magpagamot sa kanilang mga sakit.

If our people cannot travel to get the specialized care that they need, then we should bring these specialty centers straight to them. *Iyan po ang gagawin natin with this bill, which will set up specialty centers in DOH hospitals across the country. Actually, tama po si Senator Go; initially we wanted to have a stand-alone facility for heart, kidney, lung, in many parts of the Philippines. Unfortunately, alam naman natin napakamahal noon dahil magtatayo ng panibagong buildings, bibili pa tayo ng lupa, at pangatlo iyong nurses at mga medical experts ay kailangan mag-start from scratch, wika nga. We start from scratch to be able to put personnel into these specialty centers.*

Hindi na po kakailanganing lumuwas ng ating mga kababayan para sa kanilang specialized health needs, kasi dadalhin na natin ito sa mga regional specialty centers ng mga experts. Dadagdagan po natin sila ng expert personnel, medical specialist, and specialized equipment na kadalasan ay dinadayo pa sa Maynila.

Sa tulong ng ating National Specialty Centers katulad ng Philippine Heart Center, NKTI, Lung Center, Philippine Children's Medical Center, at Philippine Cancer Center na magbibigay ng training at technical assistance na kailangan ng mga specialty centers na ito. Sisiguraduhin natin na de-kalidad ang medical services na makukuha ng ating mga kababayan. Target natin na within five years of the passage of this bill, lahat ng rehiyon ay magkakaroon ng at least one specialty center, depende sa top burden of disease at iba pang pangangailangan ng region. That can be a brain and spine center, burn center, cancer center, cardiovascular center, dermatology center, eye center, geriatric care center, infectious disease center, lung center, as was sponsored earlier on the bill on mental health—a mental health center, neonatal center, orthopedic center, at marami pa pong iba—renal care and transplant center, toxicology center, et cetera.

In this way, *saan man po kayo sa Pilipinas, siguradong may access kayo sa affordable specialty care. Dito pa lang sa Senado, marami nang iba't-ibang rehiyon ang niri-represent po nating mga senador, from the Bicol Region to Davao, from the Ilocos Region to Northern Mindanao, from Central Luzon to Western Visayas—kaya umaasa po ako na full support ang mga senador sa ating panukalang ito na magdadala ng mataas na kalidad ng serbisyonng medical sa bawat Pilipino.*



And I thank the President in his first State of the Nation Address. If you have watched the speech of the President, *pagbanggit niya po ng regional specialty centers, ako po ang isa sa mga tumayo at nagbigay ng standing ovation at buong laman po ng Batasang Pambansa ay tumayo para palakpakan ito.*

I think it is about time that we start servicing our people from Northern Luzon all the way down to Southern Mindanao on these specialty centers.

So, *maraming-maraming salamat*, and I am hoping that our colleagues can pass this at the soonest possible time. *Maraming salamat din po sa sponsor, Senator Go.*

REMARKS OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Senator Gatchalian confirmed that the establishment of specialty hospitals throughout the Philippines was a 2022 campaign promise of Senate President Zubiri and is anticipated to be fulfilled within the coming days.

He then congratulated the Senate President for pushing for the passage of the measure, which would undoubtedly benefit Filipinos in all 83 different provinces of the country.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2212, Senators Angara, Ejercito, and Revilla delivered the following speeches:

By Senator Angara

Dito sa ating pagtayo sa Bulwagang ito, nais po nating suportahan ang panukala ni Health and Demography Chairperson, Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, at Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, at ating ibang kasamahan hinggil sa pagtatayo ng mga specialty center sa loob ng mga piling hospital ng Department of Health sa bawat rehiyon ng bansa.

Ito po ay alinsunod sa ating matagal na adbokasiya na "Alagang Angara," kung saan sinisigurado natin na umaabot sa bawat miyembro ng pamilyang Pilipino, lalo na kung sila ay nasa malalayo at mahirap puntahan na sulok ng bansa, ang mga serbisyo ng gobyerno katulad ng sa pangkalusugan. Kasama po kami sa nagsulong ng Universal Health Care Act, Republic Act 11223, along with Senator Ejercito, Senator Hontiveros, and other colleagues. At sinuportahan din po natin ang mga batas na humalili rito sa Universal Health Care, katulad ng Doktor Para Sa Bayan Act or Republic Act 11549 nina Majority Leader Villanueva at dating Senate President Sotto.

At bilang chairperson po ng Committee on Finance ninyo na taon-taong nakatutok sa pambansang budget, pinondohan natin ang Doktor Para Sa Bayan Act bago pa ito naging ganap na batas, at sinisigurado rin po natin na may mga pondong nakalaan para matulungan ang ating mga kababayan na nangangailangan ng serbisyong pangkalusugan. Katulad ng sa 2023 budget, ang first budget po ni Senate President Zubiri, instruction niya na lagyan natin ng dagdag na pondo ang mga specialty center sa mga kanayunan, sa mga probinsiya.

At taos-puso po tayong nagpapasalamat kay Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, ang chairperson ng ating Senate Committee on Health and Demography, "Mr. Malasakit," ang Stephen Curry ng Senate Basketball Team, sa kaniyang pag-sponsor nitong napakagandang batas. Pinagsama po niya ang magkakaibang nilalaman ng 15 panukala na inihain ng siyam na senador, kasama ang Senate Bill No. 93 ng inyong lingkod. At pinagbuklod po niya ang lahat sa isang pangitain kung saan lahat ng Pilipino ay maaaring magpatingin, magpagamot, at magpagaling tuwing sila ay may sakit. Kahit malubha na po ang kanilang karamdaman, makaaasa dapat ang ating mga kababayan na mayroon silang mapupuntahang espesyalista na handang bigyan sila ng lunas saan man sila matatagpuan.

Tama po ang ating Senate President, minsan limitado ang options ng ating mga kababayan. Dadayo pa sila sa Philippine General Hospital (PGH).

Ako ay nag-birthday many years ago sa PGH emergency ward—nagpa-Jollibee po tayo roon—at nagugulat po tayo dahil kapag tinanong natin saan ang pinaggalingan ng ating mga kababayan doon sa ER at sa iba't-ibang lugar sa PGH, mayroong taga-Maguindanao, mayroong taga-General Santos, mayroong taga-Batangas, mayroong kung saan-saang sulok ng bansa galing iyong mga pasyente sa Philippine General Hospital, which is acknowledged as one of the outstanding hospitals and, probably, the preeminent government hospital.

Kaya matagal na pong hiling ng taumbayan na dapat mas malapit sa kanila ang sistemang pangkalusugan ng ating bansa. Noong unang SONA ni President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, malakas ang palakpak at hiyaw ng mga kababayan natin at ng mga mambabatas, at may standing ovation pa si Senate President Zubiri sa likuran ni President Marcos dahil alam niyang maisasakatuparan na iyong matagal nating hangarin na magkaroon tayo ng mas mataas na uri at antas ng pagamutan na pakikinabangan ng marami—Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center, Philippine Children’s Medical Center, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Philippine Cancer Center, among others.

Hindi lang naman kasi sa Maynila lamang ang mga nagkaka-cancer, ang nagkakasakit sa puso, ang nangangailangan ng dialysis, o nagkakaroon ng karamdaman sa baga. Kung tutuusin nga, marami sa mga may sakit ay hindi taga-NCR. Naniniwala po tayo na malaki ang magiging ambag kapag maisabatas ang panukalang isinusulong ni Chairperson Go at Senate President Zubiri at ng ating kababayan.

Halimbawa po, isa sa mga problemang maiibsan ay itong kakulangan ng mga espesyalista, doktor, at mga healthcare workers sa kanayunan. Ayon po sa isang pag-aaral ng Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), nitong 2019, natagpuan na mas mababa sa 25% ng mga lungsod at bayan, or cities and municipalities, ng ating bansa ang may health human resource o HHR density na mas mataas sa 41 physicians, nurses, and midwives per 10,000 population, na pamantayan po ng World Health Organization (WHO). Ibig sabihin po, tatlo sa bawat apat na lungsod o bayan sa Pilipinas ay may kulang na HHR para makapaghain ng sapat na healthcare services.

Kung kulang po tayo ng mga general practitioner, nurse, at midwife, papaano pa kaya ang mga espesyalista na may partikular na kaalaman para sa mga partikular na karamdaman?

Kapag nagkaroon po tayo ng mga specialty centers sa mga ospital ng DOH sa bawat rehiyon, may mapupuntahan na po sa kanayunan ang mga espesyalista. At kung nagpa-practice na ang mga cardiologist, urologist, oncologist, pulmonologist, at iba pang espesyalista sa iba't ibang rehiyon ng bansa, lalaki din po ang pangangailangan o demand para sa mga nurse at sa ibang allied health professionals at healthcare workers sa kanayunan. Ibig sabihin, hindi na po kailangan magkumpulan at magsiksikan dito sa Metro Manila ang ating mga healthcare professionals and specialists. At sa ganitong paraan, mas malapit na sa taumbayan ang alagang kinakailangan nila.

By Senator Ejercito

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only exacerbated the Philippine healthcare system but also confirmed its weaknesses earlier exposed by the Universal Healthcare Act. Perhaps everything indeed happens for a reason. If not for the health crisis that is the pandemic, our government may have not realized the lack of specialty centers that we had. Somehow, the Universal Healthcare (UHC) cushioned the blows of the pandemic. However, other healthcare services and special treatments for cancer, heart, kidney, and lung diseases could not yet yield while the government focused its effort to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Seeing all of these, I cannot help but remember my 2019 campaign when I brought with me the accomplishment of passing the UHC, a landmark legislation that truly embodies our hope and dreams for the Philippine healthcare system. It was not only about me as a candidate. I was campaigning for the success of the UHC and Specialty Centers that it would achieve its goals. Though I fell short, I swore to continue my calling in whatever capacity I have.

Who would have thought that the UHC would be tested at its early stage of infancy? No one, not even the most powerful countries, have predicted the emergence of the coronavirus. However, it was a good thing that our people had the UHC. But much is to be done. To maximize the potential

of the UHC, specialty centers must be built. I felt more motivated. What began as an advocacy has become a life mission.

My last election bid was much more difficult; I lacked the funds, the machinery, and I was not a member of any major political party. It was, as I would describe it, an uphill battle. But I was fueled by my desire to push forward with the health agenda. This includes ensuring the accessibility and affordability of health services for all Filipinos.

The UHC Law, which was supported by all members of this august Chamber during the Seventeenth Congress, aims to provide guaranteed equitable access to quality and affordable health care, goods and services, including protection against financial risk. These includes the establishment and operationalization of the specialty centers within the regional hospitals.

In fact, numerous specialty centers were already established and are now functional, which includes those specialty centers in the Southern Philippines Medical Center in Davao City for Southern Mindanao; Northern Mindanao Medical Center in Cagayan de Oro for Northern Mindanao; and for Central Visayas, we have Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center; the Western Visayas Medical Center for Panay and Negros Region; and the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center for Northern Luzon, among others.

In addition, during the deliberation of the Department of Health (DOH) budget, this humble representation, together with our colleagues, especially our Senate President, Sen. Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, Majority Leader Joel Villanueva, our hardworking chairperson of the Senate Committee on Finance, Sen. Sonny Angara, and our chairperson of the Committee on Health and Demography, Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, pushed for an additional P2.2 billion funding to establish and equip specialty centers and the necessary personnel that they require.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. himself expressed his intention to duplicate specialty hospitals located in Metro Manila and across the regions. It is quite encouraging to know that the President recognizes the importance of health care and acknowledges that the government should invest on its people's well-being.

I am honored to share the same vision as the President. In spite of this development, our health sector will still need all the help we could get to ensure guaranteed access to medical services for all Filipinos

With this, it is my privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2212, which aims to institutionalize the establishment of specialty centers in the Department of Health hospitals. The proposed measure also seeks to ensure that we will have adequate supply of medical specialists and experts who will provide specialty training and technical assistance to our existing and future specialty centers.

I am very certain that if our hospitals are well-equipped, they can achieve their full potential because of the dedication and the selflessness of our healthcare workers.

I am very proud to be part of the Senate again, especially during the last budget deliberation that we added an additional P2.2 billion for the budget of the specialty centers. It will now be realized sooner in the coming years. *Ang adhikain po nating ito ay makatutulong upang mas maging epektibo ang ating implementasyon ng Universal Health Care Act. Kapag mas marami at mas malapit ang mga specialty centers, hindi lamang makakatipid sa pamasaha ang mga pasyente, makakatipid din sila sa pagod mula sa biyahe. Literal nating ilalapat ang government healthcare services sa ating mga kababayan.*

Muli, ihatid po natin sa ating mga kababayan ang pag-aalaga na nararapat nilang matanggap.

By Senator Revilla

I join the sponsor, Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, in pushing for this measure that intends to ensure equality in the quality of healthcare across the country.

Investing in health is always a step in the right direction. No "ifs" and "buts" for the best service for our *kababayans*. *Hindi kaila sa ating lahat ang mga ga-bundok na request para sa medical assistance, ang haba ng pila sa ating mga pagamutan, o ang mga datos ng mga namamatay na hindi man lamang nakikita o nabibigyan ng karampatang lunas ng isang health*



professional. *Hangad nating mailapit ang mga eksperto ng kalusugan sa bawat Juan at Juana na nangangailangan sa mga nayon at rehiyon gaano man kalayo sa kabihasanan.*

Ang ginagawa lamang natin ay inihahatid ang serbisyo medikal sa taumbayan bilang pagkilala sa ating heograpiya. It aims to give strategic access for health to the regions—walang naiiwan; walang maiiwanan. Serbisiyong pangkalusugan na tapat at karapatdapat para sa ating mga kababayan ang nais nating tiyakin.

Kaisa ako sa pagtugon na ating makakamit ang isang malakas at malusog na bayan.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 4:40 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:40 p.m., the session was resumed.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2212, Senator Cayetano (P) likewise delivered the following speech:

I rise to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2212 under Committee Report No. 67, otherwise known as the Regional Specialty Centers Act. The said measure took into consideration my Senate Bill No. 249.

Much has been said about this measure. Obviously, I am a supporter because I have filed a measure on this. But what I would like to focus on is the fact that what makes this bill special is that the Specialty Centers will be within the Department of Health (DOH) hospitals.

It is not difficult to recognize the need for specialty centers around the country. But the reality is, it will be very expensive to put up specialty centers on their own. So, this bill which provides for the specialty centers to be within the DOH hospitals solves a big part of this problem. It will be much more economical precisely because it will be able to make use of the existing DOH facilities. It is clearly cost-efficient and practical.

I just also like to add that as a senior vice chair of the Committee on Finance, I advocated for more funding for these specialty centers. In the 2023 GAA, the Senate added P2.2 billion for specialty centers. This is just one part of the pie in the solution of our health issues in the country. We cannot deny that primary healthcare must receive the biggest budget. Primary health care will allow our health professionals to attend to the needs of most of the members of the population, and only when it can no longer be handled in the primary healthcare level do we then have to elevate them to the specialty hospitals and the specialists.

This is much needed but always hand in hand with primary health care.

I look forward to seeing this become a law with the support of our colleagues.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of the following cosponsorship speeches of the senators on Senate Bill No. 2212 into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Gatchalian

I stand before you today to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2212, also known as the “Regional Specialty Centers Act,” a critical piece of legislation that will complement primary care and hospital-based general health services in our country.

The topic of healthcare will always have a special place in my heart. Having served as the mayor of Valenzuela City for nine years, I had the privilege to witness firsthand the importance of having accessible medical facilities. Valenzuela Medical Center, which provides orthopedic, pediatric, obstetric and gynecological services, among others, is just one example of our commitment to providing our constituents with the best possible specialized services.

Moreover, we recognize the importance of providing specialized care to children with special needs. To this end, we established the Valenzuela Special Education Center, which offers a comprehensive range of services such as occupational, physical, and speech therapy sessions, early intervention care, and a job transition skills program. I am humbled to have been a part of this initiative, and I believe that it serves as an excellent example of what can be achieved when we prioritize the healthcare needs of our citizens.

However, I cannot help but think about our fellow Filipinos who are facing an uphill battle to receive specialized medical care. For some, this means traveling long distances and paying for costly transportation and accommodations just to access the care they need at national specialty centers. Sadly, this reality poses a significant hurdle for those who need timely and effective healthcare the most, especially those who live in far-flung areas.

It is a harrowing experience that no one should have to endure. But the reality is that many of our fellow citizens face this struggle every single day. *Bilang mga mambabatas, may kakayahan tayong makapagsulong ng mga batas na tutugon sa pang-medikal na pangangailangan ng ating mga kababayan sa bawat sulok ng bansa.*

The passage of the Regional Specialty Centers Act seeks to address this issue. This proposed measure mandates the establishment of specialty centers in DOH-identified hospitals in every region, based on the top burden of disease and special needs in the area. *Sa madaling salita, sa panahon na kinakailangan ang agarang pag-respond, ang ating mga kababayan mula sa malayong probinsya ay hindi na ma-o-obligang lumuwas sa Metro Manila upang pumunta sa mga institusyong tulad ng Philippine Heart Center, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Lung Center of the Philippines, at iba pa.*

In addition, the establishment of specialty centers in DOH-identified hospitals likewise presents a cost-efficient, practical, and time-saving solution. These specialty centers will provide the local community access to the healthcare experts and personnel needed by the local population. In turn, this can encourage our healthcare experts and personnel to practice within their local communities as they can be recruited, trained, and specialized there. By providing access to specialized medical services close to home, we can create more job opportunities for our local medical professionals and reduce their need to seek employment abroad.

Furthermore, upgrading and complementing the existing infrastructure and equipment would be a more feasible option than constructing new specialty hospitals from scratch.

Once the passage of this bill becomes a reality, we can ensure that patients receive the necessary specialized care without unnecessary delays. This would lead to more efficient use of resources and ultimately benefit both patients and the healthcare system as a whole.

To end, allow me to express my gratitude to the sponsor of this bill, Sen. Bong Go, and to my fellow coauthors, Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri, Sen. Sonny Angara, Sen. Pia Cayetano, Sen. JV Ejercito, Sen. Chiz Escudero, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, Sen. Imee Marcos, and Sen. Robinhood Padilla, for their keen contributions in drafting this significant measure.

We owe it to our *kababayans* to ensure that they receive timely and effective healthcare, and establishing specialty centers in each part of our country is a crucial step toward achieving this goal.

By Senator Estrada

With the indulgence of Sen. Christopher "Bong" Go, I would like to be made cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 2212 under Committee Report No. 67, entitled "An Act Establishing Specialty Centers in Hospitals Under the Direct Supervision and Control of the Department of Health and Appropriating Funds Therefor."

I am in full support of this "Regional Specialty Act," which mandates the DOH to establish specialty centers in DOH-identified hospitals in every region, in coordination with the national



specialty centers such as the Philippine Heart Center (PHC), the Lung Center of the Philippines (LCP), the National Kidney and Transplant Institute (NKTII), the Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC), among others.

The DOH shall ensure that the specialty centers in DOH hospitals have expert personnel and medical specialists provided with necessary training and appropriate specialist equipment. The DOH shall prioritize funding for capital outlay investment for specialty centers through the Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP) and other fund sources. Furthermore, the DOH, in coordination with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), shall develop and implement the staffing pattern and standards for these specialty centers.

Ayon nga po sa tinuran ng ating Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos sa kanyang State of the Nation Address, marapat lamang na ang mga serbisyo ng ating mga specialty hospitals ay hindi lamang dapat dito sa National Capital Region available kundi maging sa ibang parte ng bansa. Kailangang magdagdag ng ganitong uri ng pagamutan upang mailapit natin ang health care system sa taumbayan, at tama naman po ang Pangulo.

Batid nating lahat ang kahalagahan na mailapit ang mga importante at kinakailangang serbisyo medikal sa paggamot sa buong rehiyon sa Pilipinas para sa mga sakit sa puso o cardiovascular diseases, sa mga sakit sa baga, sa sakit sa bato, sa mga sakit ng mga bata o pediatric cases, sa sakit na cancer, na siyang mga sakit na pangunahing sanhi ng pagkamatay sa Pilipinas.

This was my intention when I filed Senate Bill No. 807, entitled "An Act Providing for the Establishment of the Breast Care Centers in Every Region Nationwide, Appropriating Funds Therefore and For Other Purposes," to which I am happy to have been considered in the crafting of the substitute bill under this committee report.

I would like to commend the efforts of the Committee on Health and Demography and all my fellow authors for pushing through with this measure which seeks for the establishment and creation of more heart centers, lung centers, kidney centers, cancer centers, children centers all throughout the nation, where these types of specialized care and treatments are badly and desperately needed. This is in pursuit of our noble aspirations for a competent, reliable, available, and accessible Universal Health Care System for all Filipinos.

By Senator Villanueva

It is my honor and privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2212 under Committee Report No. 67, mandating the establishment of specialty centers in identified DOH hospitals in every region. We would like to thank and commend the Sponsor, Sen. Bong Go, for his hard work on this measure.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the top three causes of death in the country from January to November 2022 were ischemic heart diseases, cerebrovascular diseases, and neoplasm or cancer. These were also the top causes of death in previous years except in 2021, when COVID-19 was among the top three.

Last year, the ischemic heart diseases caused 103,628 deaths, or 18.4% of the total deaths in the country, followed by cerebrovascular diseases with 57,411 deaths, or 10.2% of total fatalities. Neoplasm or cancer accounted for 57,354 cases, or 10.2% of the total deaths.

These numbers tell us that further investments should be made in our healthcare system to specifically address these top causes of death among Filipinos. *Marami po sa mga may iniindang malalang karamdaman ay hindi nakapupunta sa mga ospital dahil sa malalayong lugar sila nakatira, at ang mga espesyalista at kinakailangang aparato para sa kanilang pagpapagamot ay nasa mga siyudad.*

The difficulties experienced by patients were made even worse during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I still remember hearing the news about Mang Henry, a cancer patient based in Antipolo, Rizal, who had to walk nearly five kilometers to Quezon City for his chemotherapy medicines due to lack of available transportation. Aling Cynthia, another cancer patient living in Antipolo, had to travel 20 kilometers to the Philippine General Hospital for her monthly checkup.

Kaya naman ang mga itatayong specialty centers sa mga DOH hospitals sa bawat rehiyon, base sa pangunahing sakit at espesyal na pangangailangan ng mga kababayan natin sa mga

naturang lugar, ay malaking tulong upang ma-access nila ang specialized healthcare services na kinakailangan upang agaran silang gumaling.

Once these specialty centers are established, people from the provinces will no longer need to travel to Manila or other urbanized cities to access specialized quality healthcare as these centers will have expert personnel and medical specialists, as well as specialized equipment. Mang Henry, Aling Cynthia, and countless others will no longer have to suffer long and tiring commutes to get the medical treatment they need.

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that healthcare services are available, accessible, and affordable for all Filipinos. The establishment of specialty centers in identified DOH hospitals in every region is thus an investment in our healthcare system that will promote and protect the health and well-being of all Filipinos for many generations to come.

Muli, maraming salamat po sa ating Sponsor, Sen. Bong Go. We would also like to manifest our intention to coauthor this measure.

May God bless us all.

By Senator Padilla

Nais ko pong ipahayag ang aking buong suporta sa ating iginagalang na Sen. Bong Go sa kanyang pagsisikap na isulong ang "Regional Specialty Centers Act."

Karangalan ko pong maging kapwa may-akda ng Senate Bill No. 2212 na nakapaloob sa ating tampok na Committee Report No. 67 na naglalayong ilapit ang mga serbisyong medikal ng mga Specialty Centers tulad ng Lung, Heart, at Kidney sa lahat ng mga rehiyon sa bansa. Ako po ay naghain din ng panukala sa parehong paksa – ang Senate Bill Nos. 1361 at 1362.

Ang panukala pong ito ay magbibigay ng pagkakataon sa ating mga kababayan na makinabang sa mga serbisyong medikal ng mga espesyalista nang hindi na kailangan pang lumuwas sa Maynila. Malaki din po ang hatid na tulong ng panukalang ito sa pagbawas ng gastusin ng mga Pilipino tuwing kakailanganin nila ng serbisyong medikal mula sa mga specialty centers.

Mas maraming mga Pilipino ang mabibigyan ng oportunidad na makakuha ng specialized medical services para sa mga sakit sa puso, baga, at bato - mga sakit na pangunahing sanhi ng pagkamatay ng mga Pilipino. Kaisa po tayo sa hangarin na sa mga susunod na taon ay mabawasan ang mga kaso ng pagkamatay sanhi ng mga sakit na ito dahil inilapit na ng pamahalaan ang mga specialty centers sa mga tao.

Muli po, ang aking suporta at adhikaing maipasa ng Kongreso ang panukalang ito.

By Senator De La Rosa

It is my honor to co-sponsor Senate Bill No. 2212 under Committee Report No. 67 entitled "An Act Establishing Specialty Centers in Hospital under the Direct Supervision and Control of the Department of Health and Appropriating Funds Therefor" otherwise known as the "Regional Specialty Centers Act"

During the 18th Congress when we deliberated the Doktor Para sa Bayan Act, now Republic Act No. 11509, I mentioned that I lost my two siblings when they were still little due to lack of access to medical services. They died of common illnesses without seeing a doctor.

Hindi lang po ako ang nag-iisa na nakaranas ng hirap at sakit na mawalan ng miyembro ng pamilya dahil lamang sa walang ospital na malapit. Kaya naman, Ginoong Pangulo, ako po ay sumusuporta sa mabilisang pag-pasa ng panukalang inihain sa atin ngayon ni Senator Bong Go bilang Chairperson ng Senate Committee of Health and Demography.

Ang pagkakaroon po ng regional specialty centers sa bawat DOH-retained hospital sa bansa ay isang ginhawa para sa ating mga kababayan na may sakit. Isipin po ninyo, hindi na po nila kakailanganing pumila sa National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Lung Center of the Philippines, at Philippine Heart Center na lahat ay nasa Quezon City lamang. Sigurado po akong mas mapabibilis ang kanilang pag-galing dahil hindi na po sila mapapagod pa sa malayong



biyahe papunta ng kalakhang Maynila. Ang matitipid po nila sa kanilang pamasahay ay maaari pang magamit pambili ng gamot o kaya naman ay panggastos ng kanilang pamilya.

The establishment of regional specialty centers is also in line with the policy of the current administration. No less than President Bongbong Marcos mentioned during his first State of the Nation Address that he intends to bring the health care system closer to the people.

Indeed, Mr. President, as national leaders, we have a task to ensure that social services including medical services are accessible to every Filipino whenever they need it and wherever they may be.

Nawa po ay sa tulong ng panukalang batas na ito, wala na pong pamilya ang makararanas mawalan ng mahal sa buhay dahil lamang sa malayo ang mga serbisyong medical sa bansa.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2212

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 4:43 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:44 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Zubiri presiding.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 58 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2020

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2020 (Committee Report No. 58), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MAHARLIKA INVESTMENT FUND, PROVIDING FOR THE MANAGEMENT, INVESTMENT, AND USE OF THE PROCEEDS OF THE FUND, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was still the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villar (M), sponsor of the measure, and Senator Cayetano (P) for her interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

Asked if the Senate was in a rush to pass Senate Bill No. 2020, Senator Villar (M) replied that he could not speak for the entire Senate, but that as the bill's sponsor, he would like to see it passed.

Senator Cayetano (P) recalled that it took the Senate one year to pass the CREATE Bill, which she sponsored. She stated that a bill of such magnitude necessitates lengthy deliberation because Members must study it. She stated that the Senate is known to taking its time learning about a measure, as she herself had demonstrated in the past. She asserted that senators wish to study and listen intently to the debates to determine whether or not all issues have been addressed.

Senator Villar (M) informed the Body that the committee had conducted four committee hearings, three technical working group discussions, and that it was the third day of interpellations.

Senator Cayetano (P) stated that the public could view meetings and technical working group discussions on YouTube for their own education. She stated, however, that the floor is another venue for senators to refine the measure through interpellations and amendments. She believed that the original measure was modified in the committee report, which will be highlighted during the proceedings on the Floor.

Asked for the key changes found in the committee report compared to the filed bill, Senator Villar (M) replied that among the major changes are the following: the source of funding; the incorporation of the Maharlika Investment Corporation (MIC) and having a level playing field as it is not exempt from taxes; the GSIS and SSS are no longer required or requested to invest in the fund; the composition of the board is reduced from 15 to nine directors; the streamlining of some of the structures of the MIC; and the insertion of a provision that would protect the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) in case it needs to institute changes in their commitment to the capitalization of the fund. He emphasized that the bill stipulates that the MIC can alter the bill's requirements if the BSP believes it will be unable to fulfill its obligations.

Regarding the corporate structure of the MIC, he noted that the initial measure did not specify the authorized capital, but that the committee report indicated that the fund would have P500 billion in authorized capital, of which P125 is subscribed capital. He explained that of the subscribed P125 billion, P75 billion will be covered by the combined investible funds of Land Bank (P50 billion), and DBP (P25 billion), while the remaining P50 billion will be covered by the national government through BSP dividends, per Section 6 of the proposed measure.

On the matter of having a level playing field, he stated that the MIC's investment is no longer a sovereign guarantee, aside from not being tax-exempt. He added that the committee report removed from the original bill the requirement to spend a portion of the Maharlika fund dividend on social services and projects.

Senator Cayetano (P) welcomed the removal of the provision which would restrict the investor's ability to spend dividends.

Senator Villar (M) informed the Body that the MIC is covered by the Governance Commission for GOCCs (GCG) and the Procurement Law.

Concerning the mandatory investments of GOCCs, Senator Villar (M) stated that the committee report indicates that GSIS, SSS, Pag-IBIG, and PhilHealth are no longer on the list of required investors. He clarified that Section 6 states, "Under no circumstances shall the GOCCs providing for the social security of government employees, private sector, workers and employees, and other sectors and subsectors such as, but not limited to, GSIS, Social Security System, and Home Development Mutual Fund, be requested or required to contribute to the MIC."

Senator Cayetano (P) remarked that the provision stated that the GOCCs are neither requested nor required to invest. However, she expressed concern that the aforementioned GOCCs might contribute voluntarily to the fund. She then inquired how an entity could voluntarily contribute when its leaders are appointed by the government itself.

Senator Villar (M) believed that the matter should be decided by their respective boards. He believed the GSIS and SSS to be highly professional and competent with regard to their fiduciary responsibilities.

Senator Cayetano (P) asserted that there had been instances in the past in which GOCC heads violated provisions prohibiting them from engaging in transactions that are disadvantageous to the government. As a senator for 16 years, she stated that the Blue Ribbon Committee has always been investigating suspicious transactions. She expressed concern that, although the bill is not a priority, most of the senators have always been supportive of the administration's measures. She said that as the Senate's chair of the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking, it is highly probable that the next order of business will include an investigation into the issues of volunteer investments to the MIC because so much is at stake.

Relative to the GOCCs providing social security, Senator Cayetano (P) stated that the PhilHealth had been requesting an extra funding of P70 billion annually; however, Congress could only grant them an extra P5 billion probably because of PhilHealth's finance and accounting issues. While she admitted that she did not know how much of PhilHealth's funds were devoted in certain investments, she noted how it was under the watch of the same board of directors that private hospitals have been unpaid for a long time, enough for those hospitals to fold up.

However, Senator Villar (M) pointed out that the funds that would be invested in the Maharlika Investment Fund would be secured by the numerous controls in place, such as the following:

1. the Advisory Body, composed of the treasury department of the DBM and NEDA, that would provide guidance, counsel, and advice to the MIC Board of Directors;
2. an external and internal auditor;
3. nine members of the Board of Directors that would be chaired by the Secretary of Finance, and would be joined by the chief executive officer of MIC as vice-chair and representatives from the private sector, the Land Bank, and the DBP;
4. the Maharlika Investment Fund Joint Congressional Oversight Committee;
5. the Commission on Audit rules;
6. the Government Procurement Reform Act (RA 9184); and
7. the Risk Management Unit that would be monitoring the Maharlika Fund.

He then stated that the MIF's protection was robust and was well taken up in the bill. Personally, he opined that there should be a balance in imposing further constraints given the controls already in place in Senate Bill No. 2020 to ensure that the funds would be safeguarded and invested properly.

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri relinquished the Chair to Senator Ejercito.

On the three independent directors from the private sector as members of the Board of Directors, Senator Cayetano (P) cited the following provision in Section 20, Article V of the bill:

"The Independent Directors shall not hold any business or financial interests and other relationships which could, or could reasonably be perceived to, materially interfere with his exercise of independent judgment in carrying out their responsibilities as directors."

She asked whether Congress would be able to timely review the board decisions for the purpose of safeguarding public funds and if the board deliberations would be accessible by the public. Senator Villar (M) replied by citing Section 41 of the bill:

"Sec. 41. Right to freedom of information of the public. – All documents of the MIF and the MIC shall be open, available, accessible to the public, including but not limited to:

- (a) All investments thereof, whether planned or under negotiation by the MIC and on the portfolio of the MIF;



- (b) The statements of assets and liabilities (SALNs) of the members and officials of the board of directors, risk management unit, and Advisory Board;
- (c) The SALNs of those who appointed and designated the said members and officials;
- (d) Audit documents from the internal auditor, external auditor, and the COA; and
- (e) Similar documents and information.”

As to the availability of the minutes of the board wherein the three independent directors might have objections on certain decisions, Senator Villar (M) replied that all documents of the MIC would be available to the public, including the minutes of the meeting, which are generally public documents as any regular corporate documents of the Board that are under the Corporate Code. He added that records of the MIC pertaining to its investment activities shall be secured and maintained pursuant to the rules of the National Archives of the Philippines and the disclosure rules under Republic Act No. 8799 (The Securities Regulation Code), Republic Act No. 11232 (The Revised Corporation Code of the Philippines), and other relevant laws. Further, he said that the government could ask for any documents that it would need to conduct any kind of investigation.

At this point, Senator Cayetano (P) asked if Senator Villar (M) would be open to an amendment, at the proper time, which would prevent government corporations that provide social services from contributing to the MIF. Senator Villar (M) noted that social security funds are also invested in other investment vehicles in the Philippines and even abroad. He stated that one of the main purposes of Senate Bill No. 2020 was for the national government to use investible funds to be put in projects that have social economic benefits to the country. He then asked as to why the said agencies should be prevented from investing in the MIF when they are allowed to invest anywhere else. While the proposed measure did not require them to invest, he said, that it would open the opportunity for the said agencies to earn a good return and invest in businesses that help the country.

But Senator Cayetano (P) argued that the main purpose of the social security corporations is to provide a social service, and for it to have additional income is only secondary. Senator Villar (M) pointed out that the SSS and the GSIS have investible funds and that the whole purpose of them investing in the MIF would be to maximize the money contributed by their members. He opined that the said GOCCs should not be prevented from investing in funds such as the Global Infrastructure Fund and the Maharlika Fund, which invest in local infrastructure projects and could give them a satisfactory rate of return. Thus, he maintained that there would be no need to prevent or ban the GOCCs from investing in the MIF which was designed to be invested in projects that prioritize local infrastructure and, at the same time, would give its investors a high rate of return.

On whether the MIF would surely be successful, Senator Villar (M) admitted that there is no absolute guarantee for success.

To the contention of Senator Cayetano (P) that the P125 billion that would initially be invested in the fund would already be an acceptable amount of prudence, so the GOCCs providing for the health and home security of the Filipinos should no longer be invited to invest in order that they would not be affected negatively in case the MIF fails. As a reply, Senator Villar (M) opined that there is a need to have a healthy mix of investments in order to maximize the returns of any investment and that a pooled investment statistically has less risk. For instance, he said that the bulk of funds of the GSIS or SSS are invested in very safe securities, mostly treasury bills. He added that other GOCCs are also mandated to maximize their funds in order to beat inflation and achieve a higher rate of return so that the value of their respective members' money would not go down. As such, he said that the GOCCs might need to invest in equities aside from the T-bills. He explained that while equities do not guarantee a specific return, it provides an option to earn more under favorable conditions. He averred that there are risks in investments, however, there would be specific experts who would be dealing with the risks for each investment.

To clarify, Senator Villar (M) said that the bill was not requiring the GOCCs to invest in the MIF. However, he said that the bill was leaving it as an option for the GOCCs if, based on their studies, they see the fund as profitable for them and to the country. While he acknowledged that the GSIS has very stringent rules when it comes to their investments, he said that the entity also wanted to diversify its portfolio into equities in order to maximize the value of the share for their members.

Senator Cayetano (P) stated that she wanted the Filipinos to understand that the diversification of investments would depend on one's appetite risk. While younger people could still be aggressive, she said that people nearing their retirement age could no longer afford the same risks and should be conservative because their ability to earn becomes lesser. In the same way, she advised that the national government should be conservative in allowing social service GOCCs from investing in the MIF to secure the GSIS and SSS funds for the pension of government workers and private workers, respectively, and the PhilHealth funds for the hospital bills of Filipinos. She opined that while the said GOCCs might be saddened by the missed chance to invest and gain from the success of the MIF, the same GOCCs might also be greatly affected negatively if the MIF fails. She then pushed for the non-inclusion of the GSIS, SSS, and PhilHealth funds as the said social security funds should remain conservative. She disclosed that PhilHealth's investment in specialty savings and deposits in Land Bank and DBP was merely P75 billion and should no longer be invested in the MIF.

Senator Cayetano (P) remarked that the funding to be contributed by Land Bank and DBP in the amount of P75 billion was already equivalent to the specialty savings deposit of Philhealth. Senator Villar (M) affirmed that there would always be risk factors when it comes to investments. However, he said that banks have actuarial experts who decide on the placement of the assets and almost all of the assets are in very safe investments such as T-bills and government securities which post little risk. He claimed that there was an appetite for these kinds of investments and he believed that the Maharlika fund would also be a good investment opportunity.

He recalled that when he was public works secretary, a lot of the completed projects which he handled went through the gamut of requirements from the NEDA. He stated that the studies conducted on the projects showed that they yield huge economic returns. In the same way, he said that the measure provides that the NEDA would have to go through the flagship projects which could yield very high rate of return. He expressed doubts that the GFIs could invest as much as they wish considering the very stringent requirements on how much could be invested in certain instruments. He reiterated that the Maharlika fund would be a good investment with high return and that it would certainly help the government's socio-economic projects.

On the matter of exemption of the employees and staff of the MIC from the Salary Standardization Law, Senator Cayetano (P) opined that if there were employees that are to be entitled to the exemption to the SSL, it should be the health workers. She lamented the lack of health professionals in the country, specifically nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, midwives, radiology technicians and doctors in specialty hospitals. She asked whether the sponsor would agree to remove the exemption from the salary standardization law. Senator Villar (M) stated that while he understood the point of Senator Cayetano (P), he believed that the people who would manage the fund should be offered rates that are competitive with the private sector. He averred that there are certain jobs that require a level of expertise that would need some flexibility in order to hire the best people.

Senator Cayetano (P) said that she would also want the fund with such magnitude to be managed by the best people but she believed that the Filipino people also deserve professional health care. She asserted that Congress should not look at bills in isolation but should consider a bill's effect on other bills, when it comes to funding.

Senator Villar (M) said that he sympathized with the government workers who are getting paid less than what they need. However, he believed that the solution to the problem of low salaries would be the creation of income-generating sources such as the Maharlika fund. He averred that the salary increase of the government workers would also depend on the wealth generated for the country and that it was about time to start thinking about how wealth could be generated. He stressed that investing in infrastructure projects that yield a high rate of return would increase the fiscal space and raise the salaries of government employees.

Citing his previous stint as public works secretary, he said that the DPWH had many projects that were funded through debt and the debt payments crowded out payments in other departments. He stated that a fund like the Maharlika that is designed to invest in local infrastructure projects, may be utilized to fund certain flagship projects, freeing up fiscal space in the budget which in the future could generate wealth for the country.

Senator Cayetano (P) averred that the fund could generate income but it was more of a possibility than an assurance. She asserted that Congress should not in any way add to the uncertainty by allowing or accepting funds from PhilHealth, GSIS and SSS, which are the people's money, as investment in the Maharlika fund. She opined that the P75 billion contribution from the Landbank and DBP would be more than enough. She hoped that the Senate would exercise prudence in the exercise of its powers and take its time to craft a less risky measure.

At this point, Senator Cayetano (P) stated that she was suspending her interpellation but would continue at a later time.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2020

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 6:39 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:46 p.m., the session was resumed.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 63 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2035

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2035 (Committee Report No. 63), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT MASTER PLAN, TO BE KNOWN AS THE TRABAHO PARA SA BAYAN PLAN, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Ejercito stated that the parliamentary status was the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villanueva, sponsor of the measure, and Senator Pimentel for his interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

At the outset, Senator Pimentel stated that he was in support of the bill. He then asked if the overall goal of the measure was to establish a framework process so the Philippines would have a “master plan” for employment generation. Senator Villanueva replied in the affirmative, adding that the national employment plan would ensure an employment-led growth by creating more decent job opportunities. Every time NEDA or DOF would report about GDP growth or unemployment rate, he said, people were clueless as to what sector offers opportunities; through the bill, there would be job-led growth and enhanced workers’ development because of adequate mechanisms that would support, incentivize, and promote the employability, competitiveness, and wellness of workers; promote self-reliance; spur employment generation; ensure employment security and protection; and enhance industry collaboration. He further said that the measure not only aims to come up with a national employment master plan but to also be proactive in integrating the efforts of various government agencies on employment generation.

As to the success measures and key performance indicators of the master plan, Senator Villanueva said that those could be found under Section 4 of the bill. He disclosed that to date, the country has not submitted any commitment with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Employment Policy Convention, and that all of the submitted development plans have ended in 2022, such as the Philippine Labor and Employment Plan; National Employment Recovery Strategy; Philippine Youth Development Plan; National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan; SMSEs Development Plan; Philippine Development Plan; Career Guidance Advocacy Plan; and National Youth Employment Strategy. He further revealed that the previous plans were submitted piecemeal; that those were not tied up with skills, economic or industry development; and that the Philippines has not submitted a National Employment Policy yet.

Upon checking with the ILO website, Senator Pimentel noted that the Philippines signed and ratified C122 on January 13, 1976. He asked about the obligation of the Republic of the Philippines as state party to the Convention. In reply, Senator Villanueva said that the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan would enable the country to align its plan with the six principles of ILO Convention No. 122, to wit: 1) an employment policy should ensure jobs in quantity and in quality, full, productive, and freely chosen employment; 2) member-states should explicitly commit towards employment reflected in national legislation or key declarations of intent; 3) employment policy should take into account the level of economic development, and should be in line with national practices; 4) they should ensure that economic and social policies all take into account the objective of employment, and that they mutually support it; 5) governments have to set up procedures or mechanisms through which employment-related measures can be decided upon and reviewed; and 6) consultations with social partners and the key actors should take place both at the earliest stages of policy formulation, and during the implementation process.

As to how the measure would help the country in complying with its commitments under ILO Convention No. 122, Senator Villanueva stated that the establishment of the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Inter-Agency Council would align, harmonize, and integrate all the efforts exerted by different government agencies and councils regarding employment generation, for instance, TESDA, DTI, and DOST on skills development.

On the matter of incentives, Senator Villanueva stated that there was no council or government task force that would strategize the return of incentives to generate more jobs. With the creation of an inter-agency council, he said, policies would be formulated to integrate and harmonize the functions of different government agencies, thus avoiding duplication. He added that the inter-agency council could come up with a skills development framework which would identify duplicate programs under the DTI, TESDA, and DICT.

On the possibility of the Senate resolving the issue on duplicate programs during budget deliberation, Senator Villanueva said that the members of the inter-agency council could resolve the matter. Additionally, he stated that there is also a provision regarding the submission of annual reports to Congress.

Senator Pimentel agreed that the council should be granted powers by Congress to resolve issues on duplicate programs, but he observed that the time lag in submitting reports seemed long. Senator Villanueva said that the representatives of NEDA and the committee would be open to amendments on the matter.

Senator Pimentel recalled that earlier, Senator Villanueva spoke about job-led growth. He then asked what factors aside from GDP would lead to such growth. Senator Villanueva replied that in order to achieve job-led growth, they have to ensure that the country's industry development plan and economic development plan are aligned and the council would do the alignment of the programs. To cite an example, he said that the council should ensure that the agricultural skills training programs of TESDA and the master plan for the agricultural sector of ATI of the Department of Agriculture must be aligned.

He opined that they should not just focus on the ordinary skills development training but start to focus on the ones that would lead to job-led growth. Relative thereto, he recalled his meeting the previous week with the Education Commission where they discussed the importance of aligning the Commission's efforts with TESDA's TechVoc.

Senator Pimentel believed that the country would have a healthy labor market if they would strictly implement the action components mentioned in subparagraphs (a) to (m) and by having a corresponding subplan for every action component.

He then asked if the measure would address not only the generation of employment in the private sector but also the rationalization of the employment in the government. Senator Villanueva replied in the affirmative, recalling that job orders, contractual, and casual employees were actually mentioned as they discussed the six principles of ILO. He said that the goal is to adhere to the key principles of ILO Convention to which the country committed in 1976.

Noting that there would be private representatives in the said council, Senator Pimentel asked if active participation from these representatives could be assured when discussing about public sector employment rationalization. Senator Villanueva affirmed that the council would be guided by the spirit of tripartism which includes the laborers, employers, and the government. Senator Pimentel surmised that it would be better to have members of the council focusing on the public sector employment rationalization and another on the private sector employment generation.

Asked how many members the council would have, Senator Villanueva stated that from 17 members of the National Employment Recovery Strategy Task Force, the council would be reduced to only 11 members with NEDA as chairperson and DTI and DOLE as co-chairpersons, and TESDA, DBM, DOF, DILG, DENR, one labor organization representative, one marginalized/vulnerable sector representative, and one informal sector representative as members.

As to the output of the council, Senator Villanueva said that it would be a comprehensive strategic plan on employment. He added that according to NEDA, the council would only have P4 million for its budget, which would be lodged in the NEDA's budget. Senator Pimentel hoped that they would already have a line item for the said amount under the next year's budget.

At this point, Senator Pimentel thanked Senator Villanueva for shepherding a measure which the former considered a landmark legislation considering its international implication, specifically

with regard to the country's commitment to ILO Convention No. 122. He believed that the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan could benefit more people and change more lives than the Maharlika Investment Fund.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INTERPELLATIONS

There being no further interpellation, upon of motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of interpellations.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2035

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 7:15 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:20 p.m., the session was resumed.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, May 22, 2023.

It was 7:20 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on May 22, 2023

Atty. **RENATO N. BANTUG Jr.**
Secretary of the Senate

