



Republic of the Philippines  
Senate

*Office of Senator Leila M. de Lima*

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**SEC. CARLITO GALVEZ**

Chief Implementer

Inter-Agency Task Force

For the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases

Dear *Members of the IATF*:

Greetings!

I hope this letter finds you and your families safe and in good health.

I write on behalf of the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs).

The IATF released a paper entitled "The Philippine National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines – Interim Plan" on January 2021. In the said paper, the PDLs are placed in to the classification of B4 – Socio-demographic groups at significantly higher risk other than senior citizens and indigent people.

In this letter, I hope to make a case for hastening the process of inoculation in detention and correctional facilities, particularly in the National Capital Region (NCR) and other areas with high COVID-19 incidence.

Our PDLs are one of the most ignored class of persons in our country in terms of policy and social protection.

Our detention and correctional facilities are operating beyond capacity many times over. As of August 2020, the Manila City Jail housed 5,731 in spite of their 1,200 capacity. The Quezon City Jail had 5,236 PDL in a facility designed only for 900 people. The BJMP was on record saying that there is a 608% congestion rate in NCR and 442% nationwide. The New Bilibid Prison has a PDL population of 28,505 even though it has only a 6,435 capacity. That is a congestion rate of 343% while the nationwide rate is 302%.



Our PDLs are undernourished with a food budget of only P70/day per PDL. They have access to very little or no health care. The facilities likewise have sanitation problems where access to running water is next to impossible for most inmates.

The crowded jails result in less physical distancing. Poor nourishment and sanitation increase the vulnerability of the PDLs to COVID-19 infection. And the limited access to health services means that there is a greater chance that PDLs develop severe or possibly fatal cases of COVID-19 with very little support or treatment available.

Vaccine hesitancy has forced the government to move down the priority list as the vaccines have a short shelf life. Just recently, it was announced that the A4 priority list has been simplified and expanded to include practically all the working class.

This representation respectfully suggests that our PDLs likewise be considered to move up the list, particularly in areas with high COVID-19 incidence. I implore the IATF to take into consideration the particular vulnerabilities in the case of the PDLs as justification for their immediate vaccination.

Many of our PDLs in our jails are still being tried and have yet to be convicted of the charges against them. Thus, they still enjoy the constitutional presumption of innocence. It would be yet another injustice for them if they were to be infected by COVID-19 in spite of the availability of inoculation.

Rule 24 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoner (Mandela Rules) provides:

1. The provision of health care for prisoners is a State responsibility. Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community, and should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.
2. Health-care services should be organized in close relationship to the general public health administration and in a way that ensures continuity of treatment and care, including for HIV, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, as well as for drug dependence.

It is respectfully submitted that the PDLs, especially in areas of high COVID-19 incidence, deserve their opportunity to be vaccinated in the soonest time possible given that they have very limited capability to protect themselves from the pandemic.

The tragedy is that the PDLs do not have control of their situation. During their incarceration, they are wards of the State and almost exclusively depend on our government for their safety and welfare.

I hope that this letter merits your sincere consideration.

Thank you very much.



**LEILA M. DE LIMA**

Senator