



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

# Senate

Pasay City

Office of:

*Hon. Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay*

SENATOR

April 14, 2020

## **SENATOR VICENTE "TITO" SOTTO III**

*Senate President*

Senate of the Philippines

Pasay City

Dear **Senate President Sotto**:

This refers to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Reports of the President which were submitted to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee pursuant to Section 5 of Republic Act No 11469 or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (BHOA).

There appears to be no report on the provision of burial assistance and on the safe management of human remains in relation to corona virus disease (COVID-19) other than those mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> report on relief operations to Muslim communities which include (1) burial assistance for Muslims in the NCR, (2) observance of Muslim burial customs and (3) assistance in the transportation of cadavers.

The Department of Health (DOH)<sup>1</sup> and the Department of the Interior and Local Government<sup>2</sup> have existing interim guidelines on the management of human remains of suspected or confirmed corona virus disease (COVID-19) patients. However, my office has received reports that: (1) families of those who died from COVID-19 are having a hard time securing death certificates because some Local Government Units (LGUs) and barangay officials do not know what the protocols are if a patient dies inside his or her home, and how to properly handle the bodies which can no longer be accommodated in mortuary freezers and crematoriums; and (2) some private crematoriums are asking for Php100,000 for the cremation of COVID-positive remains.

Also, as of 2020, there are only 60 crematoriums operating nationwide, 90% of which are privately-owned, and 25 out of 60 are in Metro Manila. Only 6 are publicly-owned (Manila,

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<sup>1</sup> DOH Department Circular No. 2020-0047 dated February 5, 2020, Reiteration of the Guidelines on the Disposal and Shipment of the Remains of Confirmed Cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Acute Respiratory Disease (2019-nCoV ARD)

<sup>2</sup> DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-063 dated March 27, 2020, Interim Guidelines on the Management of Human Remains for Patient Under Investigation (PUI) and Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Cases.



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Pasay, Mandaluyong, Quezon City, Dasmaringas City and Antipolo City) and are mostly operated by the local government. Of the 6, only 5 are operational which can only accommodate 3-5 cadavers a day.

Given the above concerns, it is imperative for the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) to immediately address the issues relating to the management of COVID-19 fatalities, including cadaver management, storage, burial/cremation and burial assistance to families.

The Department of Social Welfare Development (DSWD), under its Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) Program, provides the following burial assistance: (1) funeral expenses ranging from Php5,000 to Php25,000; (2) transfer of cadaver ranging from Php5,000 to Php25,000 and (3) outright cash in the amount of Php10,000 per casualty during disaster/calamity/critical events or similar circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Consistent with the purpose and mandate of the BHOA, I am submitting the following recommendations which the IATF may consider in managing COVID-19 deaths:

- National Government to cover the entire amount of burial/cremation and other related expenses for the vulnerable sectors; cash grants for the middle class sector similar to the Php10,000 outright cash under the DSWD AICS Program;
- Preparation of an inventory of privately-owned funeral homes/crematoriums to handle the remains of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases;
- Preparation of alternative storage for cadavers in case hospital morgues are filled to capacity;
- As a safety measure, death of suspected COVID-19 patients should be treated as confirmed COVID-19 cases since there are instances when results were released after the patient's actual death;
- Provision of body bags and PPE to hospitals, barangays, funeral homes/crematoriums handling human remains of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients;
- Rehabilitation of non-operational crematoriums in Manila to be environmentally compliant;
- IATF to enter into Memorandum of Agreement with mortuary associations or federations in the country for the transport of cadavers from hospitals, quarantine centers and houses;
- Adoption and implementation of clear guidelines on COVID-19 deaths at home;
- Designation of hotlines for families or individuals dealing with COVID-19 patients who died at home;

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<sup>3</sup> DSWD Memorandum Circular No. 11 Series of 2019, Revised Guidelines on the Implementation of Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation.



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- Adoption and implementation of clear guidelines on reporting of COVID-19 deaths, particularly, which agencies have the authority to report deaths - DOH, hospitals, city/municipal/barangay health centers, local civil registrar;
- Adoption and implementation of clear guidelines on the issuance of death certificates of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients (how should COVID-19 deaths be reported on death certificates?);
- Adoption and implementation of clear guidelines and assistance to LGUs, remote barangays, municipalities or geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas which have no access to funeral homes/crematoriums; and
- Dissemination of information on safe management of human remains of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

Very truly yours,

**MARIA LOURDES NANCY S. BINAY**