

**COMMENTS OF SEN. LEILA M. DE LIMA ON THE 2ND WEEKLY  
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT DATED 6 APRIL 2020**

DATE: 7 April 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 2<sup>nd</sup> weekly report dated 6 April 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

1. If the arrangement of topics in the Report should mirror the prioritization of the administration, then it erroneously gives precedence to *"Providing Emergency Assistance to all Affected Sectors"* over *"Secure[sic] Facilities and Resources for the Health Sector and Other Frontliners."*

The top priority, of course, should be the adoption of measures to contain the spread of the virus, the care of the patients, the provisioning of equipment and supplies to health workers and other frontliners, and capacitating of our hospitals and health care facilities. This is emphasized in R.A. No. 11469, or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act. But even on this vital area, the report does not say much. Could this be the reason why sequentially it was not the Number 1 topic in the report?

2. The report gave us a total (172,744) of health workers in country, without disaggregating the figure into those employed in the public and private hospitals. It glossed over the fact that most of them are in private hospitals, which serve only about 1/3 of our population. The overwhelming 2/3 of our people rely on our undermanned government-owned hospitals.

R.A. No. 11469, Section 4 (m) authorizes the hiring of temporary health workers. Aside from the offer of measly P500 as compensation per day for auxiliary medical staffer, what has the DOH done in this respect? Is it open to the suggestion of some to "conscript" senior students and graduates of medical and nursing courses? Is it tapping the network of barangay health workers in the whole country?

3. On the issue of economic assistance to the health workers, the report failed to mention if the DOH is already rolling out the system of indemnifying health workers who have contracted COVID-19 while on duty (at PhP100,000.00), and those who have passed away (at PhP1,000,000.00), as mandated under R.A. No. 11469, Section 4 (f).
4. On the number of test kits, the report merely stated that approximately 100,000 units were delivered to eight (8) COVID-19 laboratories nationwide. It did not indicate the actual inventory of test kits that we already have, the volume required based on our current and projected needs, and the plan, if any, to manufacture, purchase and/or otherwise acquire the kits in the coming days.

As to testing laboratories, it is good that we already have four (4) in NCR and one (1) each in the cities of Baguio, Cebu, Iloilo and Davao. These are not enough, of course, if we are to pursue mass testing.

5. On the conduct of tests, while the pace is picking up (with a total of 19,315 tests done as of 3 April 2020), mass testing, which is advocated by many leaders and health experts, has yet to materialize. There are news reports of initializing it on April 14 for PUMs and PUIs, but this is not reflected in the official weekly report, and we have yet to hear about plans for the greater majority of our people, especially those in the areas and sectors that are susceptible to the spread of the virus.
6. The report did not indicate the number of PPEs that we have, and those already in use by our health workers. No plan is mentioned in the report for the acquisition, manufacture, and/or purchase of PPEs and medical supplies, except to state the DTI and DOF have jointly issued guidelines for enterprises in the production and/or packaging of medicines, medical supplies and equipment.

Take the case also of available ventilators. The report stated that there are only 1,263 of them in all our hospitals, whether public or private. This is alarming. Global estimates show that 3 to 5% of COVID-19 patients require mechanical ventilation, which bumps off patients, such as stroke victims and others who similarly need intensive care.

7. On the distribution of emergency subsidies to about 18 million families, it was mentioned that about 3.7 million 4Ps beneficiaries have been able to withdraw the emergency subsidy since 3 April 2020. This has to be clarified, whether indeed the payouts were made as emergency subsidies already under R.A. No. 11469, or still under the law on 4Ps. It was earlier reported that, as of the week of March 24 to 27, the DSWD was suffering from a backlog in the disbursement of 4Ps assistance for the months of February and March. The last reported payout was supposedly made for the months of December 2019 and January 2019.

Even assuming that the downloading made by DSWD on 2 April 2020 was already for emergency subsidies of 4Ps beneficiaries under R. A. No. 11469, still the remainder of about 14 million families have yet to receive their social amelioration subsidies.

There is, in fact, much confusion on the ground now, as local executives are complaining about the “quota system” of the DSWD, where there appears to be either or both a lack of real database for the actual number of families in need, or a shortfall of funds available in the first place. The quota system is being used by certain officials of the LGUs in barring other qualified households in securing their SAC forms. There are also reports from the ground that certain officials are prioritizing households, which happen to be their supporters or affiliated to them instead of the real qualified households who are in need of assistance.

This is a brewing social volcano that has to be arrested quickly and decisively. This has been my basic point in urging the authorities to have clear guidelines in the pay-outs, coupled with the requirement of having a real database, serious mapping of households in need with a clear timeline from targeting, submission and approval of the list of beneficiaries, and a working system of distribution and logistics all throughout the country and from top to bottom of the government which should be announced to the public.

8. Finally, the report has to contain an accounting of the funds. Largely, it just reads like a summary of things accomplished thus far, and the plans of agencies that are in the pipeline. Section 5 of R.A. No. 11469 mandates that the weekly report of the President to the Congressional Oversight Committee has to “include the amount and corresponding utilization of the funds used, augmented, reprogrammed, reallocation and realigned.” This is the essence of transparency, which is a key in the oversight function of Congress, and vital to the right to information of the general public.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.

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