

**COMMENTS OF SEN. LEILA M. DE LIMA ON THE 5th WEEKLY
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT DATED 27 APRIL 2020**

DATE: 29 April 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 5th weekly report dated 27 April 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) Again and again, one of the most glaring problems is the serious backlog in the distribution of emergency subsidy even through the supposedly established network in the 4Ps program. The number of 4Ps families who have received the aid is *not* moving at all. The figure reported last week and the number in the new report are just the same: 3,721,883. This means that there are about 700,000 4Ps families – the poorest of the poor – who have not benefitted from the financial assistance from the national government since the start of the quarantine period more than 40 days ago. The DSWD should explain the reasons for the bottleneck and lay down their plan to urgently address it.
- 2) For non-4Ps families, about 1.9 million households were added to the 5th weekly report making the total at 2,504,221. Still, about 11.1 million non-4Ps families, who are poor and near-poor, have *not* received their emergency subsidy. The DSWD should likewise be asked to report about the impediments to the aid distribution among non-4Ps families, and explain any proposal to expedite the process.
- 3) As with last week's report, the current one failed to provide any update as to the purported commitment in the 3rd weekly report about raising more than PhP 60 billion to accommodate lower-middle income families in the emergency subsidy program. It will be good if future reports can provide updates on this.
- 4) As for the social amelioration program (SAP) for small businesses, the 5th weekly report failed to mention if there would be an extension of the period to apply for the program on Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS). As reflected in last week's report, the application period is only from April 16-30, 2020, where the program targets to cover some 3.4 million employees. Per the 5th weekly report, as of 22 April 2020, *only* 130,188 employees have applied. The program implementors should explain the reasons for the low turnout of applicants. Could it be because of a lack of proper dissemination of information to the public, especially the relevant sectors? Could it also be that the requirements are too stringent?

It should likewise be asked why the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) is handling the SBWS program, as stated in the 5th weekly report? Ostensibly, this is beyond the jurisdiction of the revenue-collecting agency. Should not the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), in coordination with the Department of Labor and

Employment (DOLE), be the lead agency in such a program of subsidizing the small business industry?

- 5) On the issue of support to marginalized and small farmers and fisherfolk (MSFFs) and agri-based micro and small enterprises (MSEs), the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported that it is offering zero-interest loan programs under its Expanded SURE Aid and Recovery Project. However, there are very low availment levels in both programs despite the sizable budgets. Only 777 MSFFs of the target 40,000 have so far benefitted, utilizing only PhP242.645 Million of the P1 Billion budget. On the other hand, only 15 of the total 150 agri-based MSEs have been granted loans in the aggregate amount of only P114.5 Million, which is not even 10% of the total program budget of P1.5 Billion. The DA should re-think the programs and/or its strategies. If feasible, maybe the DA can just convert the lending programs into straight subsidy projects akin to its ongoing financial assistance effort of giving one-time P5,000.00 each to small rice farmers.
- 6) On the issue of protecting Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), it is commendable that the DOJ has approved the simplified requirements and procedure of the Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP) in processing of applications for parole and executive clemency. It will be good if subsequent or separate reports can provide updates on this matter, including the number of PDLs who have applied and those who have been granted parole or executive clemency.
- 7) The related report of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) is likewise laudable, where it was found that out of 3,384 elderly PDLs charged with light offenses, 1,927 have existing medical conditions and 804 are non-recidivists. They are qualified for early release, according to the report. A future report containing updates on this matter will be appreciated.

As for the previous request last week related to the order of the Supreme Court for lower courts to consider releasing on bail some overstaying detainees, and to provisionally dismiss cases where there is failure to prosecute, we are still awaiting the report of the DOJ -- through the Prosecutor General, the Chief of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO), and the Chief of the Bureau of Corrections -- about the steps, if any, that the Department is taking in this regard, in coordination with the courts.

- 8) On the matter of Human Resources for Health (HRH), the latest report stated that the DBM has already approved 15,757 slots for temporary health workers. The pace of hiring, training and deployment however is too slow. Only 701 slots were approved by DOH for hiring in five (5) hospitals; only 639 nurses were re-deployed to Visayas and Mindanao; and only 130 were at the stage of training to collect and encode case data. The DOH should be

tasked to fast track *all* phases of engagement of HRH, and proceed with a sense of urgency.

- 9) On the inventory of available medical equipment, the recent report stated that we have 1,381 mechanical ventilators in the whole country. We have thus acquired *only* additional 118 units in a span of three (3) weeks, as it was stated in the 2nd weekly report that we then had 1,263 ventilators.

This is alarming. Global estimates show that 3 to 5% of COVID-19 patients require mechanical ventilation, which bumps off patients, such as stroke and heart attack victims and others who similarly need intensive care. The DOH should be tasked to prioritize the acquisition of ventilators, especially since it is already reported that the DBM has released the SARO to procure 1,500 more units.

- 10) It is good news that, as of 24 April 2020, there are already 19 laboratories and hospitals that are capable of handling up to 6,220 tests a day in the whole country. Another welcome development is that the DOH has recently acquired a laboratory equipment capable of conducting 45,000 tests daily. We are expectant therefore that the DOH will proceed immediately with mass testing, providing us with a clear timeline.

- 11) Finally, as with *all* the past reports, there was *no* accounting of public funds in this fifth (5th) submission of the President. It is indicated that PhP246.283 Billion were pooled savings from discontinued programs, activities and projects (PAPs) and abandoned Special Purpose Funds (SPFs). It is likewise stated that PhP128.72 Billion were collected dividends, fees and remittances from GOCCs. However, as with the earlier reports, there was really *no* explanation as to: which specific programs, activities, projects were discontinued; what particular general purpose funds were abandoned; what specific GOCC-held money was taken; and, most importantly, how these government funds were actually utilized and liquidated. End-to-end accounting, from fund sourcing, utilization, and liquidation, is a must in future or separate reports.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.

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