



Republic of the Philippines
Senate

OFFICE OF SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA

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MEMORANDUM

FOR: CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

THRU: SENATE PRESIDENT VICENTE C. SOTTO III
SEN. FRANKLIN M. DRILON
SEN. PANFILO "PING" M. LACSON
SEN. CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE T. GO
SEN. PIA S. CAYETANO

FROM: SEN. LEILA M. DE LIMA

RE: COMMENTS ON THE 6th WEEKLY REPORT OF THE
PRESIDENT DATED 4 May 2020

DATE: 6 May 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 6th Weekly Report dated 4 May 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) Has the backlog in aid distribution, even for 4Ps families, become an unsolvable problem? A mere 84,228 4Ps families were added in the latest count making the total at 3,806,111, according to the 6th Weekly Report. After more than 1 ½ months, and with a supposedly established system of distribution, there are still around 600,000 poorest of the poor households (the remainder of the total 4.4 million 4Ps families) that have *not* received financial assistance from the national government. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should point out the obstacles it encounters and explain its plans on how to finally complete the aid distribution for all 4Ps families.
- 2) For non-4Ps families, there are more than 3.9 million households that are added in the new report, a commendably big jump from the 2.5 million running total from last week. From the target of about 13.5 million non-4Ps families nationwide, there however remains a sum of 7.15 million families that have yet to get their emergency subsidy. Again, the DSWD should expedite the process, especially since it extended the period of pay out for the first (1st) tranche until May 7 for densely populated areas, and May 4 for other areas.
- 3) The DSWD has given some revealing information worthy of congressional inquiry regarding its explanation on the reasons for

the slow distribution of emergency subsidy. Deeper probe should be conducted, and the DSWD should be ready to present evidence on its allegations that: (a) target-recipients themselves have not taken preventive measures during distribution [and thus practically sabotaging their own aid program]; (b) there were threats against DSWD personnel from some LGU officials; and (c) there has been slow processing at the barangay level because of politicizing or inaccurate lists of qualified beneficiaries.

- 4) Another worrisome information in the 6th weekly report is that the *“Department of Finance (DOF) recommends that the total spending for ESP be kept within the original PhP205 Billion allotment”* citing the existence of other Social Amelioration Programs (SAPs) that run parallel to the emergency subsidy project. Does this mean that the commitment in the 3rd weekly report to supposedly raise more than PhP60 billion to accommodate lower-middle income families is now abandoned? We can imagine the dashed hopes of many ordinary private sector employees and workers in the near-middle income bracket, that includes private school teachers, non-academic personnel and young professionals, who are on a “no-work, no-pay” arrangement with their employers, and whose savings may have been wiped out already because they have been staying at home for almost two (2) months now.
- 5) As for the social amelioration program (SAP) for small businesses, the 6th Weekly Report still 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 the 4th Weekly Report, the application period was only from April 16-30, 2020, where the program has targeted to cover some 3.4 million employees. Per the 6th Weekly Report, as of 30 April 2020, *only* 1.2 million employees who have applied from the different regions have been approved. This means that only about 1/3 of the target beneficiaries have been actually reached by the program. Again, the program implementors should provide an explanation for the low turnout of applicants and grantees.
- 6) 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) has reiterated its offering of zero-interest loan programs under its Expanded SURE Aid and Recovery Project. However, as in the 5th weekly report, there are still very low availment levels in both programs despite the sizable budget allocations. Only 1,376 MSFFs of the target 40,000 have so far benefitted, utilizing only PhP244 Million of the P1 Billion budget. On the other hand, only 21 of the total 150 agri-based MSEs have been granted loans in the aggregate amount of only P160.5 Million, which is just a little over 10% of the total program budget of P1.5 Billion.
The DA should seriously considering overhauling the programs and/or its strategies. Can 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? Anyway, we do not see substantial distinctions in the circumstances of marginalized farmers and fisherfolk (subject of the loan programs) compared with small rice farmers, who are recipients of a straight emergency subsidy.

- 7) On the issue of protecting Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), the DOJ reports that the interim rules of Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP) will take effect on 15 May 2020 after its publication, and that it the BPP is already reviewing an initial batch of 200 potentially qualified PDLs. We hope a progress report can be given on this matter, expecting an expedited processing of applications with the BPP on the days to come.
- 8) The 6th weekly report is silent on any development related to the findings made by Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) last week that 1,927 elderly PDLs have existing medical conditions and 804 are non-recidivists, making them all qualified for early release. A subsequent report containing updates on this matter will be appreciated.
- 9) Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta recently announced that about 9,700 persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) were ordered released by the Supreme Court within the period of March 17 to April 29, as a measure of decongesting the jails amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Presumably, this is a result of the SC's earlier order to lower courts to facilitate the release of "overstaying" PDLs (i.e., those who have been detained for a period of at least equal to the minimum imposable penalty), and those whose cases can be provisionally dismissed for failure to prosecute. May we know the actual participation, if any, of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) in this development? Likewise, what steps, if any, has the PAO taken to utilize the other issuances of the Supreme Court to benefit qualified and low-risk PDLs, such as the circulars allowing the online filing of cases and transmission of release orders; authorizing videoconference hearings on urgent matters involving PDLs; and permitting the reduction of bail and recognizance as a mode of releasing indigent PDLs.
- 10) On the matter of Human Resources for Health (HRH), the Department of Health (DOH) should explain why it has only approved the emergency hiring of 2,083 HRH, per the 6th weekly report, when the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has already approved 15,757 slots for temporary health workers. Likewise, as observed before, the pace of hiring, training and deployment however seems to too slow. Only 24% or 499 HRH slots are currently filled up in Metro Manila hospitals. All phases of engagement of HRH, from hiring, training and deployment, should considerably pick up in terms of speed and coverage.

- 11) On the inventory of available medical equipment, the recent report again lumped together in one tally the number of PPEs, whether purchased or donated. We suggest having separate or disaggregated columns for both modes of acquisition for clarity of presentation and for observers to have a better grasp of the inventory of available medical equipment and supplies.
- 12) It is good news that the 19 laboratories for testing have ramped up its previous capacity from 6,220 tests daily to 8,935 tests currently. As for the related information, however, that it is taking the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), with the help of Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM), up to 10 weeks to conduct validation on rapid antibody test kits (that are subject of application for FDA registration), we urge for expedited processing given that we might be losing precious time in our efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- 13) PhilHealth has not contributed in the latest report, but we are interested to find out its reaction to the allegation of certain hospitals that it has not been paying them. For instance, UST Hospital just recently reported that it has retrenched workers owing to heavy financial losses, foremost of which is the P180-million accumulated expense for its patients in 2019, which PhilHealth has not allegedly refunded. If true, this might affect the trust of the medical community and the faith of the public on PhilHealth, especially amidst this pandemic.
- 14) Lastly, as with *all* the past reports, there was *no* transparency in the utilization of public funds, as evidenced by a consistent lack of accounting of all the money being used in the government's COVID-19 response. The 6th weekly report merely indicated that there were no further releases made from the PhP246.283 Billion that were pooled savings from discontinued programs, activities and projects (PAPs) and abandoned Special Purpose Funds (SPFs). It is likewise stated that PhP129.6 Billion were collected dividends, fees and remittances from GOCCs. 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. There was no explanation about the various facets of fund sourcing, utilization, and liquidation.

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.


LEILA M. DE LIMA
Chairperson
Committee on Social Justice,
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