

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
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SENATE
P. S. R. No. 347

RECEIVED BY: *ju*

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ALLEGED ANOMALIES AND CORRUPT PRACTICES IN THE PROCUREMENT OF MEDICINES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 27 states: "The State shall maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption";

WHEREAS, Section 15 of the same provides: "The State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them";

WHEREAS, Rappler.com, in its 2 November 2013 report, claimed that although Filipinos have generally benefited from the devolved functions of local government units (LGUs), such does not hold true with regard to the procurement of medicines;

WHEREAS, according to the article, the independent procurement of medicines per local government has raised issues of wasted money and the inefficient selection of purchased drugs, since as compared to before, where health professionals had the upper hand in managing health resources instead of the local executives, today, it is the other way around;

WHEREAS, municipal health officers (MHOs) are allegedly forced by mayors to sign purchase orders despite these being questionable;

WHEREAS, the article cited as an example the questionable purchase request from the office of the mayor of San Jorge, Samar for P2-million worth of medicines in January 2012; the resident barrio doctor refused to sign the request because the medicines contained therein have already been distributed the year before;

WHEREAS, another example was the purchase request for over P100,000 worth of Cotrimoxazole in the same town in Samar, which the barrio doctor also found questionable because the medicine was not a priority based on the health needs of San Jorge residents;

WHEREAS, the doctor claimed that the money could have been spent for a simple lying-in center in the rural health unit;

WHEREAS, as a result of his non-compliance with the request of the town's mayor, the doctor was removed from service;

WHEREAS, the article also cited as an example the experience of another doctor deployed in a 4th-class municipality in the Visayas, who was shocked by the steep prices of purchased medicines and medical supply;

WHEREAS, the doctor, while presenting the receipt issued by the LGU dated 13 January 2013, claimed that test tube brushes, which cost around P10 to P20 were priced at P350, while gloves, which cost P120 to P150 were bought for P550; the doctor also claimed that amoxicillin syrup which costs P15 to P20 was priced at P115;

WHEREAS, according to this doctor, the supplier and the mayor allegedly agreed on a certain jacked-up price where both get to have their share from the extra amount added on top of the medicine's real price;

WHEREAS, the doctor claimed that the worst part was not being able to object to the mayor because he feared for his life and job;

WHEREAS, according to the article, the distribution of medicines is used as a political tool since the medicines are dispensed to residents at the Office of the Mayor and not at the rural health unit, thus affecting the continuity of care delivered to the town residents;

WHEREAS, doctors and residents have reportedly complained that due to such a set-up some residents do not get the right medicine prescribed because those who distribute the medicines at the mayor's office have no health background; meanwhile, other residents feared asking for medicines from the mayor's office because they were not registered voters;

WHEREAS, some doctors have also allegedly complained that the mayors would ask them to disallow political rivals and their supporters from using the ambulance; the mayors would claim that only partymates were allowed to use the ambulance, even in life-and-death situations;

WHEREAS, one of the mayors allegedly even told their town's MHO to just let the non-partymate patient die since he, the mayor, is not obligated to help those who leave him hanging during elections;

WHEREAS, one of the doctors, who now works as an MHO in San Jorge under the "Doctors to the Barrios" (DTTB) program, reportedly said that many of the doctors under DTTB are forced to compromise their principles as they finish their two-year service in the towns they are assigned to;

WHEREAS, the DTTB is a program of the DOH, which deploys fresh graduates of medical schools to poor and remote municipalities;

WHEREAS, in another article by Rappler.com, dated 28 July 2013, Dr. Melissa Guerrero of the DOH-National Center for Pharmaceutical Access and Management claimed that constitutional term limits of local government officials also add to the problem;

WHEREAS, according to Dr. Guerrero, it became more difficult for DOH to implement the policies at the local level since the DOH has national standards that the LGUs are not enforcing; also, the constant changes in leadership create problems in implementation;

WHEREAS, due to the politicization of the procurement and distribution of medicines by the LGUs, many residents suffer from poor health and improper medication; doctors are also forced to compromise their principles, rendering them unable to work efficiently as MHOs;

WHEREAS, the current set-up implemented by the LGUs with regard to the disbursement of medicines, discourage doctors who are otherwise willing to serve their country as doctors to the barrios;

WHEREAS, it is therefore imperative for the State to address corruption at the local level by eliminating from the local government the power to procure and distribute medicines,

WHEREAS, the inability of small municipalities to buy in bulk – as they could only buy based on the needs of their population – also prevents the LGUs from taking advantage of discounted prices on the basis of the quantity of purchase; thus, it is also important for the State to craft measures and other safeguards to ensure the efficient implementation of health programs in local government units;

WHEREFORE, be it hereby resolved by the Philippine Senate to direct the proper Senate committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the alleged anomalies and corrupt practices in the procurement of medicines in local government units.

Adopted,

Miriam Defensor Santiago
MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

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