

20 MAY 26, P 3:17

**SENATE**

**S.B. No. 1543**

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**Introduced by SENATOR PANFILO M. LACSON**

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**AN ACT  
ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE VIROLOGY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
INSTITUTE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

The novel coronavirus, called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2), has caught the world unprepared. Spreading exponentially, SARS-CoV2 resulted in a global pandemic as millions and millions of people contracted the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Since its first occurrence in the last quarter of 2019, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica. On 25 May 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there have been 5,307,298 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and out of this number, 342,070 individuals died, accounting to a 6.45% fatality rate. In the Philippines, the Department of Health reported that as of 25 May 2020, 14,319 people were confirmed to have contracted the disease, and 873 of whom died – giving us a fatality rate of 6.1%. In addition, this health crisis has resulted in widespread social and economic crises, the impacts of which are devastating, especially to the poor.

The ongoing outbreak presents many concerns, particularly on effective clinical and public health management on novel viruses that cross the species barrier or what we call zoonotic viruses. This is due to very few studies and limited information on viral pathogenesis; risk factors for infection; the natural history of disease including clinical presentation and outcomes; prognostic factors for severe illness; the period of infectivity; modes and extent of virus inter-human transmission; effective preventive measures; and public health response and containment interventions. As of writing, there is no antiviral treatment or vaccine available for COVID-19 yet although fast track research and development efforts, including clinical therapeutic trials, are ongoing across the world.

Amid this pandemic, the country is also faced with problems on a novel, emerging, re-emerging, and enzootic viruses affecting livestock and plants. These problems can only be addressed using science and technology, specifically, through research and development (R&D). It is therefore imperative that we establish a Research Institute that delves into the study of viruses or the field of virology. The

country needs diagnostics to detect and limit the spread of the existing viruses; vaccines to provide long-term protection; treatments to save lives in the shorter-term, and social science to understand their behavioral and societal implications.

In light of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is most earnestly sought.

  
**HON. PANFILO M. LACSON**  
Senator



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SENATE

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RECORDED

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Introduced by SENATOR PANFILO M. LACSON

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**AN ACT  
ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE VIROLOGY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
INSTITUTE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the  
Philippines in Congress assembled:*

**SECTION 1. Short Title.** This Act shall be known as the "Virology Institute of the  
Philippines (VIP) Act of 2020".

**SECTION. 2. Declaration of Policy.** It is hereby declared the policy of the State:

- a) To protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them;
- b) To undertake appropriate health, manpower development, and research, responsive to the country's health needs and problems;
- c) To recognize that science and technology are essential for national development and progress;
- d) To give priority to research and development, invention, innovation, and their utilization; and
- e) To support indigenous, appropriate, and self-reliant scientific and technological capabilities, and their application to the country's productive systems and national life.

To this end, it is recognized that the establishment of an institute that will conduct research and development activities/in-depth study on the viruses affecting the lives of its people and resources is vital for the protection of the health of its people and the preservation of the national life.

**SECTION 3. Objectives.** This Act seeks to establish a Virology Institute that shall focus on the following key development areas for virology science and technology applications to ensure the state's sustained progress:

- a) Research on viruses using a modern approach such as molecular biology and its application or biotechnology.

- 1 b) Development of diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics (Molecular
- 2 Biotechnology)
- 3 c) International cooperation and network of databases of virus infections
- 4 d) Operation of a virus gene bank, virus genome laboratory, and virus
- 5 reference laboratory to focus on viruses circulating in the Philippines for
- 6 disease prevention and epidemiological studies.
- 7 e) Operation of a virus high containment laboratory dedicated to the study of
- 8 highly infectious and highly pathogenic viruses.

9  
10 **SECTION 4. Definition of Terms.** As used in this Act, the following terms shall  
11 mean:

- 12
- 13 a) Virology – is the scientific discipline concerned with the study of the biology
- 14 of viruses and viral diseases, including the distribution, pathogenicity, viral
- 15 cytopathicity, biochemistry, physiology, molecular biology, biotechnology,
- 16 ecology, tropism, spillover or interspecies transmission, evolution, and
- 17 clinical aspects of viruses.
- 18 b) Diagnostics – relates to methods, tests, techniques, and tools in viral
- 19 diagnosis for humans, animals, and plants
- 20 c) Therapeutics – anti-viral, nanotechnology treatment approach, nucleic acid-
- 21 based treatment, remedial agents, drugs for the treatment of viral diseases
- 22 and infections for humans, animals, and plants
- 23 d) Vaccines - are products that induce or stimulate active acquired immunity
- 24 by producing antibodies to a specific infectious agent. It helps the body's
- 25 immune system to recognize and fight pathogens like viruses or bacteria.

26  
27 **SECTION 5. Creation of the Virology Science and Technology Institute of the**  
28 **Philippines.** To carry out the provisions of this Act, a research and development  
29 institute under the Department of Science and Technology called the Virology  
30 Science and Technology Institute of the Philippines (VIP) shall be created.

31  
32 The VIP shall serve as the premier research and development institute in the field  
33 of virology, encompassing all areas in viruses and viral diseases in humans, plants,  
34 and animals. It shall act as a venue for scientists, both here and abroad, to work  
35 collaboratively to study viruses of agricultural, industrial, clinical, and  
36 environmental importance.

37  
38 The Institute shall establish strategic partnerships with the world's leading  
39 scientists, virology centers, and institutes and conduct innovative and pioneering  
40 researches that will advance the frontiers of virology in the country.

41  
42 **SECTION 6. Mandate.** The VIP shall implement policies, plans, programs, and  
43 projects for the development of virology science and technology in the country and  
44 the promotion of scientific and technological activities for both the public and  
45 private sectors, and ensure that the results of these activities are properly applied  
46 towards self-reliance and utilized to accelerate economic and social development  
47 towards the protection of the citizens and its resources.

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49 **SECTION 7. Powers, Functions, and Duties.** To accomplish its mandate, the  
50 VIP shall have the following powers, functions, and duties:

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- a) Serve as the lead convener of the Virology research agenda as part of the National Unified Health Research Agenda (NUHRA);
- b) Undertake scientific and technological research and development (R&D) in the field of virology;
- c) Conduct product R&D in the areas of diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines;
- d) Promote and undertake the transfer of the results of scientific research and development to concerned government agencies, industry, and academe;
- e) Develop and maintain an information system on virology science and technology for use by both the public and private sectors;
- f) Develop and implement, together with other entities concerned, programs for strengthening scientific and technological capabilities in virology and relevant disciplines through human resource development, infrastructure, and institution building;
- g) Undertake policy research, technology assessment, and other related researches on virology;
- h) Provide laboratory and technical services on virology;
- i) Promote and advocate the national programs on virology science and technology; and
- j) Establish linkages with local and international partners.

**SECTION 8. Organizational Structure.** The VIP shall be an attached agency of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) for purposes of policy and program coordination, and to ensure alignment in national policies and priorities. It shall be headed by a Director and two (2) Deputy Directors, one (1) for Research and Development, and another one (1) for Support, Policy, and Linkages.

The VIP shall be composed of the Office of the Director, Office of the Deputy Director for Research and Development, Office of the Deputy Director or Support, Policy, and Linkages and the following divisions:

- a) Virus Research
- b) Diagnostics and Therapeutics Research
- c) Vaccines Research
- d) Technical Services and Training
- e) Policy, Planning, and Linkages
- f) Finance and Administration

The Deputy Director for Research and Development shall head the first three (3) divisions while the Deputy Director for Support, Policy, and Linkages shall head the next three (3) divisions.

Subject to the approval of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the VIP shall determine its organizational structure and create new divisions or units as it may deem necessary and shall appoint officers and employees of the VIP following the civil service laws, rules, and regulations.

1 For this purpose, the Institute shall draw up the necessary position qualifications  
2 and standards for its personnel following the Civil Service Law, rules and  
3 regulations, in consultation with the DBM.

4  
5 **SECTION 9. The Governing Board.** The Governing Board shall be the principal  
6 policy-making body for scientific and technological activities of the Institute. It shall  
7 be composed of the following:

- 8  
9 a) Chairperson, Secretary of DOST  
10 b) Co-chairperson, Undersecretary for R&D, DOST  
11 c) Members:  
12 i. Undersecretary of Department of Health (DOH)  
13 ii. Undersecretary of Department of Agriculture (DA)  
14 iii. Director of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Philippines (CDC  
15 PHL)  
16 iv. Executive Director of Philippine Council for Health Research &  
17 Development (PCHRD)  
18 v. Executive Director of Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic, and  
19 Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD)  
20 vi. Executive Director of Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and  
21 Emerging Technology Research & Development (PCIEERD)  
22 vii. Director of Philippine Virology Science and Technology Institute (VIP)  
23 viii. Director of University of the Philippines-National Institutes of Health (UP-  
24 NIH)  
25 ix. Three (3) representatives from the Private Sector elected by the ex-officio  
26 Board Members

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28 **SECTION 10. Transfer of Offices and Units.** All offices and units under the  
29 DOST system that are handling matters related to virology shall be transferred to  
30 the VIP.

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32 The transfer of an office or unit shall include the functions, appropriations, funds,  
33 records, equipment, facilities, choses in action, rights, other assets, and liabilities,  
34 if any, of the transferred office or unit as well as the personnel thereof, as may be  
35 necessary.

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37 **SECTION 11. Engagement of Balik Scientists and Foreign Experts.** The  
38 institute may engage *Balik* Scientists and foreign experts following the terms of  
39 reference and compensation structure of the *Balik* Scientist Program.

40  
41 **SECTION 12. International Cooperation.** The VIP may enter into a memorandum  
42 of agreement or memorandum of understanding with international partners, upon  
43 the approval of its Governing Board.

44  
45 **SECTION 13. Official Site of VIP.** A lot with an area equivalent to at least five  
46 (5) hectares under the administration of the Bases Conversion and Development  
47 Authority (BCDA) within the New Clark Economic Zone in Tarlac shall be allocated  
48 exclusively for the Institute, its research facilities, and laboratories The biosafety  
49 infrastructure shall be designed based on risk assessment for handling specific

1 pathogens following the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on the  
2 establishment of a virology laboratory in developing countries.

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4 **SECTION 14. Entitlement to Magna Carta Benefits.** Qualified employees of  
5 VIP and its attached units shall be covered by Republic Act No. 8439, otherwise  
6 known as "Magna Carta for Scientists, Engineers, Researchers and Other Science  
7 and Technology Personnel in Government".

8  
9 **SECTION 15. Annual Report.** The VIP shall submit to the President and the  
10 Committee on Science and Technology in both Chambers of the Congress not  
11 later than the 30th of March of every year following the effectivity of this Act. The  
12 report shall provide a detailed account of the status of the implementation of this  
13 Act and recommended legislation, where applicable and necessary.

14  
15 **SECTION 16. Virology Research Fund.** There is hereby created a Virology  
16 Research Fund to be used exclusively for the implementation of the Virology  
17 Institute Strategic Plan, which shall be administered by the VIP following, existing  
18 government budgeting, accounting, and auditing rules and regulations. The Fund  
19 shall be sourced from the following:

- 20  
21 a) The initial amount of Two Billion pesos (P 2,000,000,000.00) to be taken  
22 from the current fiscal year's appropriation, in case the General  
23 Appropriation Act (GAA) was approved before this law is enacted.  
24 b) The income produced from its operations, technology transfer, and  
25 licensing agreements.  
26 c) Loans, contributions, grants, bequests, gifts, and donations whether from  
27 local or foreign sources. Provided, that acceptance of grants, bequests,  
28 contributions, and donations from foreign governments shall be subject to  
29 the approval of the President upon the recommendation of the Secretary of  
30 the DOST and Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The  
31 Secretary of DOST, with the approval of the NEDA and subsequently, the  
32 Department of Finance (DOF), is hereby granted the authority to enter into  
33 loan agreements with foreign financial institutions.

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35 **SECTION 17. Use of Income.** The VIP shall be authorized to use all of the income  
36 generated from its operations, as well as donations, bequests, grants for the  
37 upgrading of its physical and human resources, and for the augmentation of its  
38 budget, in case of a shortfall.

39  
40 **SECTION 18. Appropriations.** The sum of Two Billion Pesos (Php  
41 2,000,000,000.00) is hereby appropriated as an initial operating fund for the  
42 operation of the Institute, taken from the current fiscal year's appropriation.  
43 Thereafter, the amount needed for its operation shall be included in the General  
44 Appropriation Act.

45  
46 **SECTION 19. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** Within one hundred  
47 twenty (120) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOST in coordination with  
48 DBM, Civil Service Commission, and other relevant government agencies, shall  
49 promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of  
50 this Act.

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2 **SECTION 20. Separability Clause.** Any portion or provision of this Act that may  
3 be declared unconstitutional or invalid shall not have the effect of nullifying the  
4 other portions or provisions hereof as long as such remaining portion or provision  
5 can still subsist and be given effect in their entirety.

6

7 **SECTION 21. Repealing Clause.** All laws, decrees, orders, rules, and  
8 regulations or other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of  
9 this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

10

11 **SECTION 22. Effectivity.** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its  
12 publication in the Official Gazette or any two (2) newspapers of general circulation  
13 in the Philippines.

Approved,