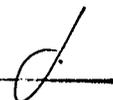


20 MAY 27 P12 :43

SENATE  
P.S. Res. No. 425

RECEIVED



---

Introduced by **SENATOR LEILA M. DE LIMA**

---

**RESOLUTION**  
**DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT**  
**AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE REAL STATUS OF**  
**MASS TESTING IN THE COUNTRY, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF**  
**ADDRESSING ISSUES THAT IMPEDE THE PROGRESS OF**  
**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

1           WHEREAS, the 1987 Constitution guarantees that the State shall protect and  
2 promote the right to health of the people;

3           WHEREAS, Republic Act No. 11469 or the “Bayanihan to Heal As One Act” was  
4 enacted declaring a state of national emergency throughout the Philippines due to the  
5 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and its “serious threat to health, safety,  
6 security, and lives of Filipinos, long-term adverse effects on their means of livelihood,  
7 and the severe disruption of economic activities”;

8           WHEREAS, Section 4 of R.A. No. 11469 granted the President the authority to  
9 “expedite and streamline the accreditation of testing kits and facilitate prompt testing  
10 by public and designate private institutions of persons under investigation (PUIs) and  
11 persons under monitoring (PUMs)”, among others;

12           WHEREAS, last March 16, President Rodrigo Duterte placed the whole island  
13 of Luzon on an enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) to contain spread of COVID-  
14 19<sup>1</sup>;

15           WHEREAS, on the same day, World Health Organization Director General Dr  
16 Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the backbone of COVID-19 response is

---

<sup>1</sup>CNN Philippines. *Metro Manila, Laguna, Cebu City to be under 'modified' enhanced community quarantine until May 31*. 12 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/5/12/Metro-Manila-Laguna-Cebu-ECQ-COVID-19.html>

1 testing, isolation and contact tracing and it is the most effective way to break chains of  
2 transmission, prevent infections and save lives<sup>2</sup>;

3 WHEREAS, last 14 April 2020, the government rolled out its “progressive”  
4 mass testing to efficiently detect COVID-19 cases. The Department of Health (DOH)  
5 released Department Circular No. 2020-00179 which states that two sub-groups will  
6 be prioritized in the expanded testing, to wit - (1) patients or healthcare workers with  
7 severe or critical symptoms and history of travel or exposure, and (2) patients or  
8 healthcare workers with mild symptoms, relevant history of travel or exposure, and  
9 considered vulnerable such as old age, presence of other illnesses such as  
10 hypertension, or those who are immunocompromised<sup>3</sup>;

11 WHEREAS, 48 days into the ECQ, DOH said that the Philippines has begun to  
12 “flatten the curve” citing the country’s new positivity rate of 10% from the earlier 17%  
13 in April, when only 13,655 tested positive of 136,169 unique individual tests<sup>4</sup>;

14 WHEREAS, Inter-Agency Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases  
15 member Dr. John Wong also said that considering the 10% low positivity rate, testing  
16 backlogs do not affect current case doubling time. Dr. Wong explained that “[e]ven if  
17 you have 8,000 backlog specimens, not all of them are expected to be positive *no?*...At  
18 the current positivity rate we only expect 10% to be positive... So 800 cases would not  
19 affect the case doubling time that much”<sup>5</sup>;

20 WHEREAS, notwithstanding reassuring claims of the DOH, Ateneo de Manila  
21 University (ADMU) Professor and mathematician Dr. Felix Muga, II refuted DOH’s  
22 claims and said that the epidemic curve or number of daily new COVID-19 cases  
23 continues to move upward<sup>6</sup> and it would be really hard to conclude that the country

---

<sup>2</sup> WHO. *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 16 March 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---16-march-2020>

<sup>3</sup>Department of Health Press Release. *DOH EXPLAINS COVID-TESTING PROTOCOL PRESS RELEASE/14 APRIL 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.gov.ph/doh-press-release/DOH-EXPLAINS-COVID-TESTING-PROTOCOL>

<sup>4</sup> Ranada, Pia and Magsambol, Bons. *DOH claims PH is 'flattening curve' based on positivity rate*. 09 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260313-doh-claims-philippines-flattening-curve-coronavirus-positivity-rate>

<sup>5</sup> CNN Philippines. *PH continues to flatten the curve despite test backlogs*. 5 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/5/5/Philippines-flattening-the-curve-COVID-19-coronavirus-lockdown.html>

<sup>6</sup> Ranada, Pia. *Mathematician refutes DOH claim of 'flattening' coronavirus curve*. Rappler. (9 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260390-mathematician-refutes-doh-claim-of-flattening-coronavirus-curve>

1 has indeed contained the disease considering the large number of backlog tests of  
2 around 2,500<sup>7</sup>;

3 WHEREAS, ROAM Philippines, a research project under University of the  
4 Philippines (UP) Diliman - Institute of Chemistry, even reported that only 0.1% of  
5 Filipino population were tested as of April 30;

6 WHEREAS, the national government's initial daily test target in April 14 was to  
7 increase testing capacity from 2,600 per day to 20,000 per day by April 27<sup>8</sup>, but DOH  
8 belatedly admitted that it was only able to reach its 8,000 daily tests last May 10<sup>9</sup>;

9 WHEREAS, the current 8,000 daily capacity is far from the 15,000 daily target  
10 of IATF Chief Implementor Carlito Galvez Jr., more so the 30,000 daily test target set  
11 by Bases Conversion and Development Authority chief and national testing czar Vince  
12 Dizon on May 30<sup>10</sup>, especially with only 30 existing licensed testing centers  
13 nationwide;

14 WHEREAS, according to Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, the current  
15 number of testing centers nationwide fell short of the goal of 78 stations by end-May<sup>11</sup>;

16 WHEREAS, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte said that despite preparation of  
17 their local government unit (LGU) for the testing of more people, they would still not  
18 conduct mass testing. Mayor Duterte confirmed that Davao City can only conduct  
19 random tests and while there will be four (4) new laboratories awaiting accreditation  
20 from DOH in their area, it would not be sufficient given the city houses more than 1.6  
21 million people<sup>12</sup>. Other LGUs like San Juan City only begun testing its frontline  
22 personnel and PUIs and PUMs on April 24, or 10 days after the start of the  
23 aforementioned roll-out of the mass testing<sup>13</sup>. Pangasinan, on the other hand, begun  
24 its mass testing only last 5 May 2020 on 16 areas which were considered as hotpots for

---

<sup>7</sup> Salgado, Ritchie. *Philippines has not flattened the curve-experts*. Bulatlat. (10 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.bulatlat.com/2020/05/10/philippines-has-not-flattened-the-curve-experts/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Magsambol, Bonz. *ECQ alone won't curb coronavirus, PH needs mass testing – UP expert*. 12 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260620-ecq-alone-wont-curb-coronavirus-mass-testing-needed>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> CNN Philippines. *Roque admits gov't slow to roll out COVID-19 testing*. 11 May 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/5/11/Harry-Roque-slow-mass-testing-rollout.html>

<sup>12</sup> Rappler. *Davao City to 'test more people' but still not mass testing*. (25 April 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/259052-davao-city-more-tests-but-not-mass-testing>

<sup>13</sup> Casinas, Jhon Adrin. *San Juan city starts COVID-19 mass testing*. Manilla Bulletin. (24 April 2020). Retrieved from <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/04/24/san-juan-city-starts-covid-19-mass-testing/>

1 COVID-19 in the province. Said mass testing only encompasses those who were  
2 considered as priority<sup>14</sup>;

3 WHEREAS, as of May 12 or 56 days into the ECQ, government data only shows  
4 151,080 tests on 137,055 individuals in the Philippines which has a population of  
5 around 108 million, with 11, 350 confirmed cases and 751 deaths<sup>15</sup>;

6 WHEREAS, to date, we have yet to reach the expected number of tests to be  
7 conducted daily. The initial scope of the mass testing should have been slowly  
8 expanding at this point given that there are recent discoveries of numerous  
9 asymptomatic COVID-19 cases in the country, particularly that of Cebu City wherein  
10 90% COVID-19 positive cases were asymptomatic, and were considered as “super virus  
11 spreaders”<sup>16</sup>;

12 WHEREAS, DOH also has admitted to be struggling in dealing with paper  
13 forms while health facilities have been unable to update their records with the  
14 onslaught of new COVID-19 cases<sup>17</sup>;

15 WHEREAS, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire pointed out that  
16 while laboratories are able to run tests, some tests are not immediately recorded  
17 because of the lack of encoders. She said some laboratories might only have two  
18 encoders despite the fact that they run thousands of tests a day<sup>18</sup>;

19 WHEREAS, DOH USec. Vergeire said that there are more than 40 other  
20 laboratories that are also applying for accreditation. However, she attributed the delay  
21 to the inability of the applicant laboratories to comply with requirements because they  
22 do not have experience in biosafety<sup>19</sup>;

23 WHEREAS, while the DOH has improved in terms of data gathering, the UP  
24 Covid-19 Pandemic Response Team also emphasized that there is still a critical need

---

<sup>14</sup> Austria, Hilda. *Pangasinan starts mass testing at COVID-19 hotspots*. Philippine News Agency. (5 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1101941>

<sup>15</sup> *Supra Ibid* 1

<sup>16</sup> Newman, Minerva BC. *Manile Bulletin. DOH-7: Asymptomatic COVID-19 cases are “super virus spreaders”*. 8 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/08/doh-7-asymptomatic-covid-19-cases-are-super-virus-spreaders/>

<sup>17</sup> Sabillo, Kristine. *ABS-CBN News. DOH ‘hopeful’ to reach 8,000 testing capacity soon, cites encoding delays*. 30 April 2020. Retrieved from: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/30/20/doh-hopeful-to-reach-8000-testing-capacity-soon-cites-encoding-delays>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

1 for the “speed and timeliness” data after they observed evident inconsistencies and  
2 inaccuracies in the DOH data and that of LGUs in terms of number of positive COVID-  
3 19 cases in their region or municipality<sup>20</sup>. Further highlighting the importance of  
4 accurate and relevant data, the team stated “If we keep our information in silos, our  
5 collective efforts and perspective of the situation narrows and so do our chances to  
6 maintain and preserve public health and security”<sup>21</sup>;

7 WHEREAS, almost two (2) months since the implementation of ECQ, and with  
8 multiple unaccomplished COVID-19 testing goals, the President, through his  
9 Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, announced on 12 May 2020 that the National  
10 Capital Region (NCR) will remain under a modified ECQ while other parts of Luzon  
11 seen as low risk will slowly be relaxing the implementation of quarantine with the  
12 caveat that LGU officials are given the authority to place high-risk barangays with  
13 recorded COVID-19 cases under strict ECQ rules;

14 WHEREAS, a research published by UP Mathematics professor Guido David,  
15 UP Political Science Professor Ranjit Singh Rye, and Maria Patricia Agbulos concluded  
16 that, “[a] premature relaxation of the ECQ in the NCR may result in an escalation of  
17 24,000 cases and 1,700 deaths by 15 June 2020”<sup>22</sup>;

18 WHEREAS, there is also the problem of COVID-19 related deaths which are not  
19 properly accounted for because the persons died before testing was done. According  
20 to a report, there exists no national total of how many Filipinos have died of  
21 circumstances that resemble COVID-19, but were never confirmed by lab testing. Even  
22 the Department of Health (DOH)’s COVID-19 Tracker only counts the deaths of  
23 confirmed cases<sup>23</sup>;

24 WHEREAS, during the first 23 days of operation of the Baesa Crematorium, it  
25 had cremated 145 bodies in its first 23 days, with the furnaces burning eight bodies a

---

<sup>20</sup> UP COVID-19 Pandemic Response Team. *Prevailing Data Issues in the Time of COVID-19 and the Need for Open Data*. (12 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.up.edu.ph/prevailing-data-issues-in-the-time-of-covid-19-and-the-need-for-open-data/>

<sup>21</sup> Magzambol, Bonz. *U.P. experts say ‘open data’ is part of fight vs COVID-19*. Rappler. (12 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260654-anomalies-doh-data-hinder-up-experts-making-sense-coronavirus-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR3g4yQVaY8zKyawrPnFfk-oECbIVk3x3s88S>

<sup>22</sup> Buan, Lian. *Early easing of ECQ in Metro could result in 1,700 deaths by June - study*. Rappler. (10 May 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260437-study-easing-ecq-metro-manila-more-deaths-by-june>

<sup>23</sup> Zambrano, Chiara. *COVID-19 Pandemic: The Uncounted Deaths*. ABS-CBN News. (15 May 2020). Retrieved from: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/specials/coronavirus-cases-deaths-philippines>

1 day for the most part. But only eleven of these are “COVID-positive.” The remaining  
2 134 are “COVID-related.”<sup>24</sup>;

3 WHEREAS, it appears that we are not only having difficulty scaling up the  
4 testing facilities, we are also having difficulty in providing the corresponding  
5 administrative infrastructure to support the testing program;

6 WHEREAS, without mass testing, we do not have any data to support the easing  
7 of the quarantine levels. In fact, based on the limited data being reported out by the  
8 DOH, we are maintaining a daily average of more than 200 new cases per day. As we  
9 are already two months into the quarantine, this data suggests that there is still  
10 continuous transmission, in spite of the quarantine;

11 WHEREAS, the lack of effective mass testing has effectively hampered our  
12 ability to control the spread of the virus by denying us leads for contact tracing, which,  
13 in turn prevents us from isolating and containing the infected individuals;

14 WHEREAS, more than lockdowns and quarantine, it has been proved in many  
15 countries, that testing is the first step towards controlling the transmission of COVID-  
16 19;

17 WHEREAS, there is need to identify the reasons as to why we are still way  
18 behind on testing, in spite of already months of intensified government efforts against  
19 COVID-19;

20 **NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY**  
21 **RESOLVED**, to direct the appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in  
22 aid of legislation, into the real status of mass testing in the country, with the end in  
23 view of addressing issues that impede the progress of government response to COVID-  
24 19.

Adopted,

  
LEILA M. DE LIMA

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*