

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE )  
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES )  
*Third Regular Session* )



**SENATE**

**P.S. Res. No. 955**

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

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**RESOLUTION**  
**DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT**  
**AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE RECENT ROW**  
**BETWEEN FILIPINO POLE VAULTER ERNEST JOHN “EJ” OBIENA AND**  
**THE PHILIPPINE ATHLETICS TRACK AND FIELD ASSOCIATION**  
**(PATAFA) INVOLVING THE LIQUIDATION OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT**  
**TO THE ATHLETES, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF DETERMINING THE**  
**EVENTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THEIR STANDOFF AND**  
**CRAFTING THE APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO PREVENT SIMILAR**  
**EVENTS FROM HAPPENING IN THE FUTURE INVOLVING**  
**NATIONALLY-FUNDED ATHLETES**

1           WHEREAS, Article II, Section 13 of the 1987 Constitution declares, in part, that  
2 “[t]he State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote  
3 and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being”;

4           WHEREAS, Article II, Section 17 of the same declares that “[t]he State shall give  
5 priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster  
6 patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human  
7 liberation and development”;

8           WHEREAS, the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) was created through  
9 Republic Act No. 6847 in 1990 to serve as the “sole policy-making and coordinating  
10 body of all amateur sports development programs and institutions in the Philippines”.  
11 Its primary function is “to provide the leadership, formulate the policies and set the  
12 priorities and directions of all national sports promotion and development,  
13 particularly giving emphasis on grassroots participation”;

14           WHEREAS, on 21 November 2021, it was reported that the Philippine Athletics  
15 Track and Field Association (PATAFA) has ordered Olympic pole vaulter, Asian record  
16 holder and fifth-ranked in the world, Ernest John “EJ” Obiena, to return €85,000

1 (P4.8 million) in financial assistance after claiming he “falsified the liquidations  
2 submitted to the PATAFA and failed to pay the coaching fees of Mr. Vitaly Petrov”;<sup>1</sup>

3 WHEREAS, Obiena, in a later press conference, denied such allegations and  
4 filed a counter-complaint with the Philippine Olympic Committee (POC), the  
5 International Olympic Committee (IOC), and World Athletics. He stated that the  
6 incident had damaged his reputation and welcomed a court of law to shed light on the  
7 matter. His coach, Mr. Vitaly Petrov, joined him in the press conference and himself  
8 disputed PATAFA’s allegations that he had yet to be paid by Obiena;<sup>2</sup>

9 WHEREAS, in the same press conference, Obiena demanded “a full and public  
10 withdrawal of investigation, and a full public apology from the authorities involved”,  
11 otherwise he would retire from competition altogether;<sup>3</sup>

12 WHEREAS, Obiena, however, admitted that some of his liquidations were  
13 “submitted late and sometimes in a sloppy fashion”. He had previously requested for  
14 his coaches to be paid directly in order to focus his time and energy into training for  
15 competition but this had been refused;<sup>4</sup>

16 WHEREAS, PATAFA later countered Obiena’s claim of “character  
17 assassination” stating that the investigation being conducted by its Board on Obiena  
18 was purely internal and had been kept away from the prying eyes of the public. It added  
19 that PATAFA had “acted on a statement signed by Obiena’s coach, Vitaly Petrov, who  
20 informed the association that he did not receive payment for his services to Obiena”;<sup>5</sup>

21 WHEREAS, the dispute between Obiena and PATAFA had even reached the  
22 Senate when it recalled the proposed 2022 budget of the Philippine Sports  
23 Commission (PSC) for supposedly taking a “hands-off” approach on the issue;<sup>6</sup>

24 WHEREAS, according to a source from the athletic body privy to the  
25 investigation, given the involvement of taxpayers’ money, Obiena would have to face  
26 his federation’s probe “whether he likes it or not”;<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inquirer Sports Staff. (21 November 2021). *Patafa orders Obiena to return financial assistance*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442325/patafa-orders-obiena-to-return-financial-assistance>

<sup>2</sup> Lozada, B. (21 November 2021). *EJ Obiena files formal complaints vs Patafa, says claims ‘damaged my reputation’*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442387/ej-obiena-files-formal-complaints-vs-patafa-says-claims-damaged-my-reputation>

<sup>3</sup> Lozada, B. (21 November 2021). *EJ Obiena demands apology from Patafa, threatens to retire amid row*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442405/ej-obiena-demands-apology-from-patafa-threatens-to-retire-amid-row>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Navarro, J. (22 November 2021). *Patafa belies EJ Obiena claim of ‘character assassination’*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442494/patafa-belies-ej-obiena-claim-of-character-assassination>

<sup>6</sup> Ramos, C. M. (23 November 2021). *Senate recalls PSC budget over ‘hands-off’ stance on Obiena, Patafa issue*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442515/senate-recalls-psc-budget-over-hands-off-stance-on-obiena-patafa-issue>

<sup>7</sup> Navarro, J. & Castillo, M. R. (24 November 2021). *Patafa to push its probe while Obiena wants all evidence out in court*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442620/a-day-of-reckoning>

1           WHEREAS, the Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) also bemoaned the rift  
2 between EJ Obiena and PATAFA and tasked its Ethics Committee to investigate the  
3 matter. However, the POC also hinted that the PSC could have easily intervened from  
4 the very beginning since it was the source of Obiena’s funding;<sup>8</sup>

5           WHEREAS, the issue may be little more than a misunderstanding which has  
6 been blown out of proportion. However, the PSC should step in and diffuse the  
7 situation to ensure that no more barbs are thrown that may cause irreparable damage  
8 to the relationship between Obiena and PATAFA;

9           WHEREAS, national athletes are a source of national pride. Whenever they  
10 compete and excel, they become beacons of hope and inspiration to hundreds of  
11 millions of Filipinos to never give up on their dreams. While there seems to be no other  
12 option but to let the investigation play itself out, the PSC should review its guidelines  
13 and procedures to ensure that these types of incidents are altogether avoided for the  
14 sake of our national athletes;

15           WHEREAS, it should also be the policy of our sports agencies to minimize, if  
16 not remove, administrative tasks from our athletes in order to allow them to focus on  
17 training and prepare for sporting events without having to worry about the  
18 bureaucratic requirements that accompany the spending of public funds;

19           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE, to direct the  
20 appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the  
21 recent row between Filipino pole vaulter Ernest John “EJ” Obiena and the Philippine  
22 Athletics Track and Field Association (PATAFA) involving the liquidation of financial  
23 support to the athletes, with the end in view of determining the events and  
24 circumstances that led to their standoff and crafting the appropriate measures to  
25 prevent similar events from happening in the future involving nationally-funded  
26 athletes.

*Adopted,*

  
**LEILA M. DE LIMA**

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<sup>8</sup> Giongco, M. (23 November 2021). *POC to investigate EJ Obiena-Patafa mess*. Retrieved 29 November 2021, from <https://sports.inquirer.net/442530/poc-to-investigate-ej-obiena-patafa-mess>