



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 13th WEEKLY REPORT OF THE
PRESIDENT DATED 22 June 2020**

DATE: 24 June 2020

I humbly submit my comments on the President's 13th Weekly Report dated 22 June 2020, in compliance with Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469:

- 1) The lead implementers of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), particularly the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS), failed to answer this representation's repeated queries, some of which were also asked by my colleagues in the Senate, thus:
 - a. What is deadline for the full implementation of the 1st tranche of cash aid?
 - b. What is the agency's plan of action regarding the 291,722 targeted households which are still not served by the DSWD in the 1st tranche, as reported in the 12th Weekly Report?
 - c. What is the total number of beneficiaries who have returned their cash aid due to duplication, with a breakdown of the amounts and their respective areas?
 - d. What are the results of the validation and cross checking processes by the DSWD and other relevant agencies agencies as regards the distribution of 1st tranche of cash assistance?
- 2) Instead of answering our comments and questions (outlined in Item no. 1 above), the table on the summary of implementation of SAP has been removed in the latest report, unlike in the previous weekly

reports. May we know why that table was omitted in this latest submission?

- 3) The DSWD did not respond to our previous request to include the following information and data in the 13th Weekly Report of the President to Congress related to the distribution of the second tranche of the SAP-AICS. Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2, series of 2020, identified 10 regions and additional 3.5 million families (instead of the 5 million beneficiaries earlier announced) who should expect to receive the cash aid for the month of May. In view of this, it is imperative for the concerned agencies to submit in the next report the following:
 - i. Approved target number of beneficiaries for the second tranche;
 - ii. Total budget for the adjusted target of beneficiaries;
 - iii. Target completion date of the second tranche; and
 - iv. Information showing how many of the targeted beneficiaries household will receive the cash aid through ATM cards and other digital platforms, door-to-door, and physical claiming in the LGU offices.

Let me remind the DSWD that we are already approaching the last week of June and this long-overdue cash assistance continues to be delayed for more than a month now.

- 4) The 13th Weekly Report indicated five (5) major factors that contributed to the delay of the distribution of the cash subsidy for the month of April. It seems that the DSWD is placing the blame on the LGUs alone. This representation would like to put on record other equally significant factors that added to the unsatisfactory distribution of the SAP-AICS, thus:
 - a. The highly cumbersome process which accounts to 30 steps, as revealed in a hearing in the House of Representatives last 22 June 2020;
 - b. The perennial changing of the policies and guidelines which have caused widespread confusion among the LGUs and the targeted recipients;
 - c. The failure of implementing agencies in setting the deadline before the implementation of the program, where it was announced in the media a month after the program's roll out, thus, pressuring the LGUs that resulted in gruesome lines of beneficiaries whose panic and disorientation caused them to overlook the required health protocols;
 - d. Failure in fixing a real or reliable number of target beneficiaries of the program, and, worse, setting a "quota system" for pre-determined yet almost arbitrarily pegged number of recipients per LGU, without the benefit of updated databases nationally and per locality.

Given these observations, we ask the DSWD and other implementing agencies to submit the information and data required in Item 3 above, so as to avoid or mitigate in the second tranche the factors that contributed to the dismal failure in the distribution of 1st tranche of the SAP-AICS. This pertinent data is being requested in the spirit of public transparency and public accountability, while acknowledging the vital importance of the oversight function of Congress to ensure the effective implementation of Republic Act No. 11469, or the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act”.

- 5) The latest report conspicuously omitted data on the accomplishments of various agencies handling different SAPs, especially the major ones like the cash aid for low-income households, and the wage subsidy for small businesses. Is this omission deliberate?

Likewise, we note the failure of reporting in the recent submission on our previous request for a detailed explanation on the results of Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS) Task Force’s preliminary matching between DOLE’s CAMP (COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program) and SBWS program lists showing that around 193,000 out of 680,000 CAMP recipients are also SBWS beneficiaries. We are still interested in knowing what has been done with respect to this. What corrective measures, if any, have been adopted to avoid further leakage or waste of resources?

- 6) In the section on transportation, repatriation and mobility assistance, it is simply reported that “the number of repatriated Filipinos could reach 100,000 or even higher in the coming months.” That section was however silent on the point raised in one of our previous comments that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) should come up with a definite plan to solve the lack of commercial flights for our returning OFWs.

Concomitantly, on the matter of financial assistance for displaced OFWs under the COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program- Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong (CAMP-AKAP) under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the latest report merely showed the respective releases of budget for the 1st and 2nd tranches, and attempted to explain the reasons behind the prolonged delay in the distribution, e.g. lockdown measures in host countries and varying banking regulations, but without DOLE giving us the actual figures of how many beneficiaries have been reached (so far) per tranche, the respective amounts of money utilized, and the DOLE’s plan to expedite the process of distribution.

- 7) Still on the issue of transportation assistance to returning OFWs and locally stranded individuals (LSIs), the latest report merely stated that, a total of 30,495 LSIs have returned to their respective

residences. It added that the DILG issued guidelines on “one-stop-shop” station for the prompt and efficient assistance to LSIs.

May we just know the DILG’s reaction to the news reports that these unplanned returns of LSIs to the provinces have resulted in the spike of COVID-cases in the countryside. Thus, Dr. Rotgene Solante, former president of the Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, has urged the government to review its screening of people who want to avail of its return-to-the-province (*Balik Probinsya*) program following a surge of COVID-19 infections in the Eastern Visayas region, making it the third most infected region in the country.

- 8) In the section on Accounting of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) has reported a total of 4,188 released PDLs. BJMP clarified that the said figure reflects only the released PDLs from BJMP facilities.

May we then know of any progress in the number of releases from other jails and prisons under the control and management of provincial governments and the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor)?

Likewise, as in the previous reports, we would like to hear some updates from the Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP).

- 9) In the section on Expanded SURE Aid and Recovery Project, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has now reported that for MSFF, PhP494.945 Million of the PhP 1 Billion budget was already utilized, as of 16 June 2020. The DA and the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC) failed to explain the obvious discrepancy that was pointed out in our comment last week. In the 11th weekly report, it was already stated that PhP863.93 million, or more than 80% of the PhP 1 billion budget, was already utilized for MSFFs. However, in the 12th weekly report, the amount utilized was only PhP 386.29. The older report has a much bigger figure – almost half a billion! – compared with the amount reported in 12th Weekly Report. The Filipino people and the Congress deserve an explanation on this matter.
- 10) As regards our consistent observation about the low turnout of beneficiaries in DA’s lending programs, the ACPC has attributed the causes primarily to the difficulties in identifying beneficiaries, and lack of updated database of MSFFs. This is an admission of poor planning and lack of foresight. How was it possible that government programs with budgets running in the billions were approved and implemented without the aid of baseline data, i.e., database of intended clientele, and mapping and identification of program beneficiaries? A deeper Congressional probe into these matters should be launched immediately.

- 11) In responding to our other recurring comment that maybe the DA and the ACPC should consider converting its lending programs into simple subsidy projects (akin to the cash aid for low-income families, and wage subsidy for small businesses), it was explained that the budget for the lending program is to be exclusively for the benefit of small farmers and fisherfolk, pursuant to the national budget of 2020. But, is it not the main point of RA 11469, or the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act”, to empower the President to realign budget items and reallocate existing program funds of any agency for any suitable purpose in response to the pandemic? Is not this later law a sufficient legal basis for the DA and ACPC to be flexible enough to transform the lending programs into subsidy projects that certainly will benefit more marginalized farmers and fisherfolk?
- 12) The section on assistance to women, children and other vulnerable groups and cybercrime activities has been removed. May we request for updates regarding this very important agenda in the next report.
- 13) In a new subsection on the policy on the conduct of “mass testing” or expanded testing, the report mentioned that the country is below the threshold of the WHO’s *positivity rate* of 10%, which accounts to 7-8%, that may *possibly* mean we are able to test even those who may not be infected. I hope this is not the reason for the agency’s evident complacency to scale up our testing capacity. Since the 9th Weekly Report of the President to Congress, we are still confronted with the same issue on lack of testing equipment and supplies and the lack of manpower and the growing worker fatigue, as disclosed in the 13th Weekly Report of the President to Congress. For almost a month now, the executive branch, particularly the DOH and IATF, has reported the same challenges which remain to be unaddressed. This is very disappointing and alarming, as well.
- 14) Despite claiming in the report that the DOH is apparently implementing strategies to ramp up our testing capacity, the data provided in the report does not reconcile with this assertion. The number of “fresh” cases increases constantly yet our capacity remains the same. This representation wishes to be clearer on this point, thus:
 - a. Despite the increased capacity of licensed laboratories in the country that are capable of conducting a maximum of nearly 42,000 tests a day, the average number of tests being processed remains at 10,000 in the last three (3) weeks, as mentioned in the previous report;
 - b. There has been slow contact tracing, coupled with the failure to meet the ideal contact tracers per population ratio, which should be one (1) contact tracer for 800 people, in order to further curb the transmission of the virus as acknowledged by Secretary Duque as early as 14 May 2020 in a televised

- briefing. The DOH and/or DILG must heed the suggestion of tapping barangay health workers (BHWs) and 4Ps parent leaders to carry out our contact tracing efforts;
- c. Inability to provide the public with real-time data on COVID-19 cases remains a growing concern. The DOH, DILG, DICT and other concerned agencies must work harder to integrate information collected on COVID-19 developments from digital applications being used in our contact tracing efforts i.e StaySafe.ph, COVID-KAYA and SafePass, which are supposed to help the decision makers with real-time data.

- d. The 13th Weekly Report disregarded its regular disclosure on the number of laboratories that has been accredited on a weekly basis and reported a monthly summary. Despite this attempt to conceal the real number, the fact remains that there are still hundreds of pending and unprocessed applications for COVID-19 testing laboratory accreditation.

It is becoming patently clear that instead of flattening the curve, government authorities have flattened our budget and the capacity to outpace this pandemic.

- 15) We would like to reiterate our previous comments regarding reports of increasing cases of healthcare workers getting infected with the COVID-19. May the DOH include in the next report a sub-section that provides us the number of the active cases of health care workers with COVID-19, those who are able to recover, and those who have succumbed to the illness?
- 16) On the subsection on efforts to increase human resource for health (HRH) hiring, we take note the challenges that the DOH pointed out in the report. However, these challenges are a result of its own dismal performance in responding to the pandemic which has resulted to the lack of trust and confidence of health workers themselves in getting on board for the job posts being offered. It needs to address the issues that this represented raised in Item No. 8 of this Memorandum. Notwithstanding the reports of the delayed release of the Special Risk Allowance (SRA) for DOH personnel, the agency must also rethink its current employment package for our health workers.
- 17) In the section on responsive and sustainability recovery plan, the report fails to respond to the clamor for a plan for the resumption of operations of traditional jeepneys, subject to required public health standards and guidelines. News reports mention that only modern jeepney are now allowed to operate starting June 22, 2020. What is the plan of the government for the thousands of traditional jeepney drivers who have been out of work, some of whom have even resorted to begging on the streets just to find some means to provide their families' basic needs?

- 18) There are still no updates concerning the NBI's earlier report about the discovery of an underground medical facility in Fontana Leisure Park in Pampanga, and the arrest of two (2) Chinese nationals allegedly running an illegal pharmacy in Angeles City, Pampanga despite our repeated request. May we be given progress reports on these two (2) incidents, as well as the discovery of other underground hospitals for POGO workers, such as in Makati City?
- 19) The section on budgetary measures to fund COVID-19 efforts has been deleted flagrantly in the 13th Weekly Report. The report also failed to provide critical developments, if any, on the budget allocated and spent per agency, in line with the clear provision under RA 11469 for the government to explain how it is sourcing and spending the budget intended for COVID-19 response. Does this mean there has been no expenditure spent by the government in the past two weeks? Is this omission not a blatant failure of the Executive Branch to conduct financial disclosure, as mandated by RA 11469?
- 20) We reiterate our previous comment and request -- almost like a broken record now -- to be provided with a comprehensive report on the total number of loans and the aggregate sums being borrowed from foreign banks in response to the current pandemic. May we also be given copies of the loan contracts, financing agreements and related papers for purposes of transparency and the right to public information?

For your consideration, please.

Thank you very much.



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