

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)

SENATE

P.S.R. No. **473**



Introduced by **SENATOR RISA HONTIVEROS**

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN
INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE REPORTED DEATHS OF
PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY (PDLs), INCLUDING HIGH-PROFILE
DRUG CONVICTS OF THE NEW BILIBID PRISON, ALLEGEDLY DUE TO
COVID-19

WHEREAS, on July 20, 2020, Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) Chief Director General Gerald Bantag confirmed that drug convict Jaybee Sebastian, along with eight other high-profile inmates, died due to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, in an anonymous list circulated among members of the media, the other inmates who supposedly passed away were Benjamin Marcelo, Zhang Zhu Li, Jimmy Kinsing Hung, Francis Go, Jimmy Yang, Eugene Chua, Ryan Ong, and Amin Imam Buratong¹;

WHEREAS, BuCor spokesperson Gabriel Chaclag had previously said that 18 inmates in 2 facilities managed by the BuCor had succumbed to COVID-19, while 343 inmates in total have tested positive²;

WHEREAS, according to Director General Bantag, an inmate's cadaver is mandatorily cremated within twelve (12) hours to prevent the spread of infection, and the identities of those who died may not be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Data Privacy Act;

WHEREAS, the National Privacy Commission (NPC) through Commissioner Ramon Liboro disputed the position of Director General Bantag and said that the Data Privacy Act cannot be invoked in this case, as Sebastian had become a public figure "on account of their previous association with particular issues in the past";

WHEREAS, Panteon de Dasmarinas Public Cemetery in Dasmarinas, Cavite confirmed that the body of one Jaybee Sebastian was cremated by them on 18 July 2020. Further to this, Cavite Representative Elpidio Barzaga said that the BuCor paid Dasmarinas City PhP15,000 for each deceased prisoner, but the crematorium personnel do not open the body bags anymore, "so long as there were death certificates and the proper papers";

WHEREAS, considering that globally, COVID-19 has a mortality rate of 0.5 – 1%³ and in the Philippines around 2.5%, it is baffling how the disease managed to wipe out nine drug lords in one fell blow, including Sebastian who was just 40 years old at the time

¹ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1309104/covid-19-kills-9-high-profile-inmates>

² <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/07/19/20/18-bucor-inmates-succumb-to-covid-19>

³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01738-2>

of his death and well below the at-risk age group;

WHEREAS, the Senate had previously conducted investigations on corruption within the BuCor, including cases of "Good Conduct Time Allowance for Sale" and other schemes where high-ranking officials of the Bureau would dispense favors to rich inmates, in exchange for monetary consideration;

WHEREAS, the lack of reliable information on the deaths of the inmates, the track record of some officials within the BuCor, and the improbability of the fatality rate, create enough doubt in the mind of a reasonable person on the veracity of these deaths;

WHEREAS, even if no corruption is proven, it is important nonetheless to review the health and sanitary conditions in our penal institutions so that the abnormally high number of COVID-19 fatalities might be addressed;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, by the Senate of the Philippines to direct the appropriate Senate Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the reported deaths of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), including high-profile drug convicts of the New Bilibid Prison, allegedly due to Covid-19.

Adopted,


RISA HONTIVEROS
Senator