HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 973


RESOLUTION
CALLING ON THE APPROPRIATE HOUSE COMMITTEES TO INVESTIGATE, REVIEW, AND ASSESS, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, THE DELAY IN THE PROVISION OF THE SOCIAL AMELIORATION MEASURES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT PURSUANT TO REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11469, OR THE "BAYANIHAN TO HEAL AS ONE ACT"

WHEREAS, following the sharp increase in the number of local transmissions of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), on 16 March 2020, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte issued Proclamation No. 929, declaring a state of calamity throughout the Philippines due to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, responding to the call of the President to address the crisis facing the nation, on 24 March 2020, Republic Act ("R.A.") No. 11469, or the "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act" was enacted into law, declaring a state of national emergency over the entire country in view of the continuing rise of confirmed cases of COVID-19, the serious threat to the health, safety, security, and lives of our countrymen, the long-term adverse effects on their means of livelihood, and the severe disruption of economic activities and authorizing the President to "exercise powers that are necessary and proper to carry out the declared national policy;"

WHEREAS, the imposition of community quarantine and strict social distancing measures, while necessary to stop the spread of the virus and minimize its negative impact on the whole country, restricted mobility among people, necessitated the suspension of operations or even closure of businesses, and mandated the stoppage of mass public transportation, and obliged the implementation of alternative work arrangements both in the government and in the private sector;

WHEREAS, the abovementioned measures designed to contain the virus have unavoidably and regrettably caused severe disruption in economic activities throughout the country, and affected the means of livelihood and subsistence of Filipinos, especially low-income households, senior citizens, pregnant and lactating women, solo parents, distressed overseas Filipinos, persons with disability, indigenous peoples, and underprivileged and homeless families;
WHEREAS, in order to respond to the crisis brought by the pandemic, Congress authorized the President under Section 4 of R.A. No. 11469, among others, to—

"(c) Provide an emergency subsidy to around eighteen (18) million low income households: Provided, That the subsidy shall amount to a minimum of Five Thousand Pesos (P5,000.00) to a maximum of Eight Thousand Pesos (P8,000.00) a month for two (2) months: Provided, further, That the subsidy shall be computed based on the prevailing regional minimum wage rates: Provided, finally, That the subsidy received from the current conditional cash transfer program and rice subsidy shall be taken into consideration in the computation of the emergency subsidy as provided for in this Act;"

WHEREAS, Section 3 of R.A. No. 11469 recognized the urgent need to "immediately mobilize assistance in the provision of basic necessities to families and individuals affected by the imposition of the Community Quarantine, especially indigents and their families," as well as to "undertake a program for recovery and rehabilitation, including a social amelioration program and provision of safety nets to all affected sectors;"

WHEREAS, the general principle espoused by the President in the distribution of aid is that the 18 million Filipinos who are most vulnerable to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the community quarantine must get the resources at the fastest possible time with the least number of requirements and regulations;

WHEREAS, from 30 March 2020 to 03 April 2020, the DSWD issued Memorandum Circulars ("M.C.") Nos. 04, 05, 06, 07, all series of 2020, to serve as special guidelines on the provision of social amelioration measures by the Department to the most affected areas under community quarantine and continuation of the implementation of the social pension for indigent senior citizens;

WHEREAS, the DSWD required the use of Social Amelioration Cards ("SAC") "to be the mechanism for the eligible families to access any social amelioration programs from any government agency, including the DSWD;

WHEREAS, at the outset it was already complained by various sectors that the SAC form as required by the DSWD was too long, tedious, and intimidating to accomplish, even requiring information that are irrelevant to the distribution of the emergency subsidy, such as monthly income, identification number, health condition, sector, and details of family members;

WHEREAS, the requirement and use of a SAC also confused some LGU officials allegedly because M.C. No. 07, s. 2020, stated that SAC forms were no longer needed for the beneficiaries of the Unconditional Cash Transfer while the DSWD-Regional Directors ("RD") claimed that the SAC form were required for liquidation purposes;

WHEREAS, the DSWD initially prescribed a lengthy and complicated procedure requiring a total of thirty (30) steps and five (5) layers of approval with an estimated completion time of three (3) weeks. The steps, among other, include:

- Every recipient filling out two (2) copies of a Social Amelioration Card ("SAC"),
- Obtaining a certification from the barangay that the recipient is in need of assistance,
- Validation of the SAC forms by the barangay,
- Further validation by the City or Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer ("CMSWDO"),
- Another validation by the Local Chief Executive,
- Review by the city/municipality for completeness and correctness of the data to be submitted to the DSWD-Central Office ("DSWD CO") for deduplication,
• Another review by a designated DSWD personnel to ensure that no duplication of assistance will be given to a single family,
• Generation of the list of beneficiaries by the DSWD-CO,
• Cascading said list to the LGUs, which then still has to (1) withdraw the cash amount for distribution, (2) prepare the cash in envelopes, (3) coordinate with the Department of the Interior and Local Government and/or ask assistance from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police for the pay-out, before finally being able to distribute the assistance hands of the recipients;

WHEREAS, the issuance of four M.C.s in a span of five (5) days, in addition to the prescription of a 30-step procedure caused confusion to LGUs and the intended recipients, thereby unnecessarily exacerbating the mental anguish and serious anxiety they have experienced as a result of the pandemic;

WHEREAS, members of the House of Representatives, in line with their oversight functions, did a time and motion study of the set guidelines and concluded that the earliest payout resulting from the prescribed procedure of the DSWD will take at least ten (10) to fifteen (15) days;

WHEREAS, the leadership and members of the House of Representatives repeatedly urged the DSWD during several meetings, and via the media, to review their guidelines for distribution of the SAC, including recommendations to coordinate closely with the LGUs by sharing critical information regarding 4Ps recipients, for the purpose of streamlining the process, making it more efficient, and expediting the delivery of the much-needed cash assistance;

WHEREAS, members of the House of Representatives had been in touch with several LGUs and there was a consensus, at the time, that without streamlining the procedure and consolidating all the circulars, they would be constrained to either violating the guidelines and give the pay-outs right away, or strictly adhere to the specified guidelines and not be able to give aid within ten (10) to fifteen (15) days;

WHEREAS, there has been a failure in communication with the DSWD RDs as some LGUs have complained that the latter were not open to suggestions from LGUs, even if cooperation between involved entities is of utmost importance;

WHEREAS, the complaints from LGUs were not limited to the speed of distribution but also to the number of recipients. The DSWD arbitrarily and without consultations with the LGUs, based the number of recipients on the 2015 national census, slightly adjusted upwards. Five years have passed and certainly the population has increased since, and thus the estimate proved inadequate;

WHEREAS, based on data from the DSWD, the allocation for the National Capital Region, Region III, and Region IV-A was grossly inadequate compared to others;

WHEREAS, due to the restrictive numbers of recipients proposed by DSWD, many of the LGUs have been in a quandary to identify whom to prioritize among their constituents since their expectation is to be able to give aid to 3 out of 4 families, even as some of our citizens expected that everyone will be receiving some sort of assistance from the Government;

WHEREAS, the DSWD, in a letter dated 04 April 2020, laid out a shortened process flow for the distribution of aid. However, it was observed by some members of the House of Representatives that the new proposed process would still take at least 10 days from the orientation with LGUs regarding the SAC forms and the submission of the list of families with
SAC to the IATF, with the 10-day period still not including the actual payout to the beneficiaries. The complexity of the process and guidelines remained the same and continues to because for confusion and misunderstanding by the LGUs and the general public;

WHEREAS, contrary to the principles and directives set forth by the President to expedite the distribution of assistance to the public, the aforementioned concerns and issues caused delays which led the DSWD to miss distribution deadlines twice and for the 2nd tranche of distribution intended for the month of May to be deferred;

BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the appropriate Committee, shall investigate, review, and assess, in aid legislation, the delay in the provision of the social amelioration measures by the DSWD pursuant to RA 11469 or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

Adopted,

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