A RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION ON THE DEATHS OF THE NEW BILIBID PRISON HIGH PROFILE INMATES ALLEGEDLY DUE TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, last July 20, 2020, the Department of Justice (DOJ) confirmed that nine high-profile New Bilibid Prison (NBP) inmates died of COVID-19, including Jaybee Sebastian, a convicted kidnapper and car thief who served as a witness and co-accused in one of the drug charges against Senator Leila de Lima;

WHEREAS, according to the death certificate of Jaybee Sebastian, he died of acute myocardial infarction, or heart attack, while at NBP Hospital at 10:15 a.m. on July 18, 2020 and COVID-19 was listed under “other significant conditions contributing to death”;

WHEREAS, a list of high-profile NBP prisoners who reportedly died of COVID-19 was mysteriously circulated to journalists last July 18;

WHEREAS, the said list included Benjamin Marcelo, leader of Chinese inmates at NBP; Zhang Zhu Li, Jimmy Kinsing Hung, Francis Go, Jimmy Yang, Eugene Chua, Ryan Ong and Amin Imam Buratong;

WHEREAS, when asked to verify the list, the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) spokesperson Gabriel Chaclag sent a statement of BuCor chief Gerald Bantag, who admitted there had been deaths due to COVID-19 but declined to identify the fatalities purportedly because of the data privacy law;

WHEREAS, the National Privacy Commission (NPC) stated that the Data Privacy Act is not applicable on information regarding public figures like high-profile inmate Jaybee Sebastian;

WHEREAS, in reports, NPC commissioner Mon Liboro was quoted as saying that, "The Data Privacy Act is not a cloak for denying the public's right to know. High-profile inmates like JB Sebastian had become public figures on account of their previous association with particular national issues in the past";

WHEREAS, he further stated that, "There is a justified public interest to release information like details surrounding the deaths from COVID-19 of these high-profile inmates, especially when the personal information being sought is linked to issues already on the minds of the public";

WHEREAS, it was reported that the Panteon de Dasmariñas Public Cemetery in Dasmariñas, Cavite, logged Sebastian, Marcelo, Zhang and Hung as among the 28 bodies they had cremated since May 31;

WHEREAS, it was also reported that the Manila North Cemetery cremated a body identified as Eugene Chua;
WHEREAS, last July 22, the BuCor presented to the media copies of the death certificates of Amin Imam Boratong, Eugene Ho Chua, Francis Go, Benjamin Marcelo, Sherwin Sanchez, Willy Yang, Shuli Zhang and a notice of death was presented for Hung Kin Sing Jimmy, also known as Jimmy Ang;

WHEREAS, documents show that the eight inmates died in May and June;

WHEREAS, because of the initial refusal of the BuCor to release the names of the inmates who died, speculations and other questions have been raised whether the deaths of high-profile inmates were faked or simulated;

WHEREAS, there are even reports stating that there was no way of knowing if the BuCor replaced the body of an inmate with that of another person as there were no more fingerprints;

WHEREAS, there allegedly could be "body-switching" in which dead inmates who are cremated due to COVID-19 are falsely identified so that high-profile inmates could go free;

WHEREAS, there are too many questions and mysterious circumstances surrounding the "deaths" of these inmates and there is a need to look further and investigate the matter;

WHEREAS, it must be determine if the bodies that were cremated were indeed that of the high profile inmates; if the inmates are really dead or they were set free; and if they are dead, then the true reason of their deaths should be uncovered, whether it was caused by COVID-19 or not.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the House of Representatives to direct the Committee on Justice to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation on the above issue and thus serve notice to all concerned, including the DOJ, BuCor, the National Bureau of Investigation and such other agencies which may shed light and resolve the issue

Adopted,

RUFUS B. RODRIGUEZ