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BUDGET BRIEFINGS

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission on Audit (COA) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Eric Go Yap (Party-List, ACT-CIS), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the COA, CHED, and DSWD.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. “Kuya” Jose Antonio Sy-Alvarado (1st District, Bulacan), presided over the budget briefing of COA.</p> <p>COA Chair Michael Aguinaldo presented COA’s proposed FY 2021 budget of P13.57 billion which is 3.55% higher than its current budget of P13.09 billion. By expense class, COA’s proposed budget will be distributed as follows: personnel services (PS), P12.91 billion; maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P573.42 million; and capital outlay (CO), P86.92 million.</p> <p>Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) inquired about how COA audits the intelligence funds allocated to certain government agencies.</p> <p>Aguinaldo said that COA abides by Joint Circular No. 2015-01 issued on January 8, 2015, which provides for the guidelines on the entitlement, release, use, reporting, and audit of confidential and/or intelligence funds. He, however, admitted that there is an inherent limitation on the part of COA to audit intelligence funds since they are confidential in nature.</p> <p>Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) requested the commitment of COA to conduct a special audit on the refunds given to the customers of the Manila Electric Company (Meralco), as ordered by the Supreme Court in its ruling in 2003, to verify whether Meralco fully complied with the ruling.</p> <p>Aguinaldo disclosed that the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) also requested COA to audit the refunds given by Meralco, which he said is really the job of ERC. He, however, said that COA can assist in validating the findings of ERC after the latter has concluded its own audit.</p> <p>Rep. Sy-Alvarado requested the assistance of COA in the investigations of the House of Representatives with regard to the alleged irregularities in the distribution of the government’s Special Amelioration Program (SAP) and the alleged anomalies and corruption in the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth).</p> <p>Rep. Janette Garin (1st District, Iloilo) also asked COA to look into the list of PhilHealth members. She narrated that during her stint as Secretary of Health, she learned that there were Filipinos who were still not enrolled with PhilHealth or did not know if they were PhilHealth members. This led her to conclude that PhilHealth membership is not at all increasing and that the list of members is just being manipulated to make it appear like it is increasing. She alleged that what PhilHealth is doing is to submit a list of existing dependents or existing enrollees of PhilHealth to the Department of Budget and Management, falsely declaring them as new PhilHealth members. There are also instances where the names of the</p>

Continuation...
Appropriations

- Commission on Higher Education (CHED)

members are repeated and even names of persons who are already dead are included in the list for purposes of padding it, Rep. Garin said. She stressed that the government allocates billions of pesos for its share in the premium payment of PhilHealth members and the amount has increased over the years. This questionable practice in PhilHealth might jeopardize the success of the government's goal of providing "universal health care for all Filipinos."

Aguinaldo agreed and expressed his willingness to help and to provide information required in these Congressional inquiries. He said that the COA is also doing its own investigation of the alleged anomalies and corruption in PhilHealth. He mentioned that now, COA can already connect to the electronic database of PhilHealth, which will help COA detect anomalies in PhilHealth transactions. For the longest time, COA has been having difficulty connecting to PhilHealth's electronic database because the state-run health insurance has been invoking the Data Privacy Law. However, the Data Privacy Commission already issued an opinion which effectively allows COA to do so.

Rep. Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), and all Members present expressed their support for an increase in the budget of COA.

The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of COA.

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Luis Campos Jr. (2nd District, Makati City), sat as the presiding officer during the CHED's budget briefing.

Under the FY 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the CHED is set to receive a budget of P50.93 billion which is 6.39% higher than its current budget of P47.91 billion. By expense class, CHED's 2021 proposed budget will be distributed as follows: PS, P465.56 million; MOOE, P48.97 billion; CO, P195.88 million; and Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF), P1.29 billion.

For purposes of expediency, the Committee immediately proceeded to the interpellation on CHED's FY 2021 budget by the Members and just requested CHED to submit its presentation to the Committee.

Replying to the query of Reps. Castro and Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) CHED Chairperson J. Prospero de Vera III reported that the number of student-beneficiaries who availed themselves of the Free Higher Education Program under RA 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTE) Act have increased gradually from 1.18 million in 2018, during its first year of implementation, to 1.33 million in 2019. Moreover, De Vera said that under the Tertiary Education Subsidy Program, CHED has expanded its subsidy coverage from 288,000 student-beneficiaries in 2018 to 557,000 in 2019.

De Vera noted, however, that the biggest challenge for CHED in implementing the programs under RA 10931 is administrative in nature since there are only about 600 plantilla positions in the Commission operating nationwide to date. This situation has caused delays in the release of subsidies or reimbursements to students in certain areas. The COVID-19 pandemic all the more made it difficult for the CHED personnel to do their tasks, De Vera added.

Another reason, De Vera added, is the non-compliance by certain state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs) with the requirements pertinent to these programs. De Vera requested Congress to pass a law that will augment the

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and its attached agencies 	<p>manpower complement and improve the organizational structure of CHED to fully perform its mandates and functions.</p> <p>In reply to the query of Rep. Quimbo on the P600 million allotment under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act for students affected by the quarantine measures, De Vera said that CHED has yet to sit down with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to discuss the matter because the funding covers students in tertiary, technical and vocational, and K to 12 programs in both public and private schools.</p> <p>Rep. Gabriel Bordado Jr. (3rd District, Camarines Sur) mentioned the difficulties being experienced by faculty members in the conduct of flexible learning. De Vera said there are "big" universities that extend support to other schools by way of technical trainings particularly in the conduct of online classes. He admitted, however, that the current pandemic situation is, in reality, a continuing development process for all.</p> <p>Reps. Rodriguez, Mark Go (Baguio City), Sarah Jane Elago (Party-List, KABATAAN), Jose "Pingping" Tejada (3rd District, North Cotabato), and Angelo Marcos Barba (2nd District, Ilocos Norte) urged the reinstatement of several billions of pesos of budgetary allocations for CHED for FY 2019 and 2020 which were discontinued in line with National Budget Circular (NBC) No. 580 issued by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).</p> <p>Pursuant to NBC No. 580 issued on April 22, 2020 on the adoption of economy measures in the government due to the emergency health situation, CHED's allocation for 2020 was reduced by P13.9 billion. Likewise, De Vera said, the balance of UAQTE allocation for FY 2019 which amounts to P1.4 billion and P3.6 billion funding augmentation for 2020 were likewise discontinued. Other unobligated allotments for FYs 2019 and 2020 as of March 2020 amounting to P760 million were likewise returned to the government coffers in line with the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (RA 11469).</p> <p>The CHED responded to the issues and concerns raised by the Members in relation to CHED's program implementation under the new normal in their respective districts.</p> <p>The CHED was requested to submit to the Committee a list of non-compliant SUCs and LUCs based on RA 10931. It was likewise asked to submit an updated report on NBC No. 461, on the pending 8th cycle guidelines for the evaluation of teaching and teaching-related positions in SUCs which is expected to be completed this year according to De Vera. (NBC No. 461 establishes and prescribes the rules and regulations governing the implementation of the Revised Compensation and Position Classification Plan for faculty positions in SUCs, higher education institutions, and technical education institutions in accordance with the modified common criteria for evaluation of faculty positions.)</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Jocelyn Sy-Limkaichong (1st District, Negros Oriental), sat as the presiding officer during the deliberations on the proposed 2021 budget of the DSWD and its attached agencies.</p> <p>DSWD Secretary Rolando Joselito Bautista said that under the FY 2021 NEP, the DSWD and its attached agencies will have a budget of P171.22 billion which is 4.39% higher than the current year's budget of P164.02 billion. A huge portion of the DSWD's proposed budget will go to the DSWD Proper amounting to P169.29 billion and the rest will be distributed to its attached agencies as follows:</p>
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Continuation...
Appropriations

- National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) - P1.2 billion;
- National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) - P246.46 million;
- Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor (PCUP) - P191.87 million;
- Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC) - P109.12 million;
- Inter-Country Adoption Board (ICAB) - P69.45 million;
- Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) - P63.18 million; and
- National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) - P52.81 million.

Secretary Bautista stated that the budget utilization rate of the DSWD for FY 2019 is 94.26% and for FY 2020 (as of August 31), 40%. He also apprised the body that a total of P207.6 billion was allocated to the DSWD for the first and second tranche of the SAP.

For the first tranche of the SAP, the DSWD and the local government units (LGUs) have covered 99.55% of the 17.9 million target family beneficiaries and utilized 99.49% of the P100.4 billion budget allocated for the first tranche. For the second tranche, P82 billion has been disbursed so far, benefiting 13 million family beneficiaries.

House Members proceeded to ask questions on matters pertaining to specific items of the proposed budget and the implementation of DSWD programs.

Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) inquired on the reasons behind the incomplete payouts for the second tranche of the SAP. She also mentioned some of the complaints of beneficiaries with regard to the digital payouts of the SAP such as being charged service fees by GCash and PayMaya. She said that these are financial service providers (FSPs) that entered into partnership with the DSWD and thus should not charge any service fee.

DSWD Undersecretary for Social and Welfare Development Danilo Pamonag attributed the delay in the payouts to the delay in the submission of LGUs of their validated list of beneficiaries.

As to the service fees imposed by the FSPs, DSWD Undersecretary for Operations Aimee Torre Franca-Neri requested Rep. Brosas if she could furnish the DSWD a copy of the complaints so that it could verify the matter and possibly refund the amount to the affected beneficiaries, if warranted.

On the other hand, some problems may be attributed to the beneficiaries themselves, according to DSWD Undersecretary for Inclusive and Sustainable Peace Rene Glen Paje. He disclosed that four of its partner-FSPs in the National Capital Region (NCR) have recorded around 853,000 accounts with "failed" transactions which are due to wrong information supplied by the beneficiaries such as their mobile numbers and even their first and last names.

Rep. Castro asked the DSWD what programs will be "underfunded" for FY 2021.

DSWD Finance and Management Service Director Wayne Belizar presented the original budget proposal of the DSWD for the following programs: Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), P6.5 billion; Supplemental Feeding Program (SFP), P5 billion; Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens (SPISC), P24 billion; and Disaster Response Operations, P1.9 billion. The DBM reduced the

Continuation...
Appropriations

budget of the first three programs, giving only P4.3 billion, P3.7 billion, and P23.19 billion, respectively. For the Disaster Response Operations, however, the DBM approved P2.01 billion which is slightly higher than the DSWD's original proposal.

DSWD Assistant Secretary for Statutory Programs Glenda Relova added that the DSWD's proposed budget for capital outlay amounting to P1.08 billion was not approved by the DBM. She said this budget is supposed to cover the cost of repairing various DSWD centers nationwide. She likewise mentioned that the proposed budget to further improve DSWD's mechanized system for the production of family food packs was also not approved by the DBM.

Replying to Rep. Castro's query on whether the list of beneficiaries under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) has already been updated, 4Ps National Program Manager Gemma Gabuya said that the list is now comprised of 180,000 new beneficiaries replacing the same number of "graduates" of the program.

Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) inquired on the steps undertaken by the DSWD in response to the high number of DSWD personnel that got infected with COVID-19.

DSWD Assistant Secretary for General Administration and Support Services Group Rodolfo Santos confirmed that 247 employees got infected by the virus and that they were referred to hospitals and quarantine facilities for free testing and treatment. Frontline employees are also given hazard pay, personal protective equipment (PPE), and transportation, accommodation and meal subsidies.

Rep. Ma. Lourdes Arroyo (5th District, Negros Occidental) expressed concern for the welfare of unmarried Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as they were not qualified as beneficiaries under the SAP. She also asked the DSWD if it has its own allocations for programs benefitting PWDs, other than those being implemented by the NCDCA. (Rep. Arroyo is the Chairperson of the Special Committee on Persons with Disabilities.)

Relova said that single PWDs are qualified beneficiaries of the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) program of the DSWD and may avail of this program instead. As for the budget allocation for PWD programs, Belizar said that the DSWD has it for FY 2020 in the amount of P10.97 million and for FY 2021 amounting to P11.6 million.

Rep. Zarate called for the reinstatement of approximately P800 million slashed by the DBM from the original budget proposal of the DSWD for SPISC. He said that the budget reduction will affect the pension of many indigent senior citizens.

On the reduced budget for CWC, Rep. Elago queried on how this will affect the agency's programs for children citing its budget of only P63.18 million for FY 2021 compared to the current year's budget of P119.77 million.

CWC Executive Director Mary Mitzi Cajayon-Uy said that the CWC still has "For Later Release" funds under its FY 2020 budget amounting to P46.1 million that may be tapped as additional funds.

On the query of Rep. Christopher de Venecia (4th District, Pangasinan) if the CWC has allocated a budget for monitoring and preventing online exploitation of children, Cajayon-Uy said there is none.

Continuation... Appropriations		<p>Rep. Lawrence "Law" Fortun (1st District, Agusan del Norte) inquired on the status of implementation of RA 8505 or the Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998. Relova said that the DSWD has so far set up 27 Rape Crisis Centers nationwide.</p> <p>Several Members commended the DSWD for all its efforts to help the affected people during the pandemic and recommended an increase in the FY 2021 proposed budget of the Department.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to terminate the deliberation on the proposed 2021 budget of the DSWD and its attached agencies.</p>
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ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Muslim Affairs	Organizational meeting and adoption of the Committee's Internal Rules of Procedure	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Ansaruddin Abdul Malik Adiong (1st District, Lanao del Sur), held its organizational meeting during which the Committee's Rules of Procedure for the 18th Congress was adopted.</p> <p>Under the Rules of the House, the Committee has jurisdiction over "all matters directly and principally relating to Muslim affairs inclusive of the welfare of Muslim Filipinos and the development of predominantly Muslim areas."</p>

COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Government Enterprises and Privatization jt. w/ Local Government	Consolidated Bill on HBs 2438 & 2966	Reps. Alvarez (P.) and Matugas	Creating the Siargao Development Authority, prescribing its powers, functions and duties, providing funds therefor	The Joint Committee, co-presided by Rep. Eric Olivarez (1 st District, Parañaque City), Chair of the Committee on Government Enterprises and Privatization, and Rep. Noel Villanueva (3 rd District, Tarlac), Chair of the Committee on Local Government, approved the Consolidated Bill on HBs 2438 and 2966 subject to style and amendment.
	HBs 6214, 6285, 7249, 7256, 7280, 7294, 7313 & 7360	Deputy Speaker Duterte, Reps. Bautista, Olivarez, Marquez, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Reps. Tambunting, Rodriguez, and Garcia (J.E.)	Creating the Boracay Island Development Authority, defining its powers and functions, providing funds therefor	<p>The Joint Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the eight bills.</p> <p>Upon the request of Rep. Teodorico Haresco Jr. (2nd District, Aklan), the Joint Committee agreed to conduct a public hearing to hear the sentiments of the people in the area relative to the proposed Boracay Island Development Authority.</p>
	HB 7636	Rep. Garcia (J.E.)	Creating the Manila Bay Development Authority, prescribing its powers, functions and duties, providing funds therefor	<p>The Joint Committee agreed to deliberate further on HB 7636 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Upon the request of Rep. Manuel Luis Lopez (1st District, Manila), the Joint Committee agreed to invite the 13 mandamus agencies that were directed by the Supreme Court to clean up and rehabilitate the Manila Bay, as well as the local government units around the Manila Bay area to comment on the bill.</p>

Muslim Affairs	HB 1582	Rep. Sangcopan	Declaring the first day of February of every year as National Hijab Day	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Ansaruddin Abdul Malik Adiong (1st District, Lanao del Sur), approved HB 1582.</p> <p>Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan (Party-List, AMIN), author of HB 1582, mentioned that a bill with similar subject matter was approved on Third Reading by the House of Representatives during the 17th Congress.</p> <p>Based on the explanatory note to the bill, the wearing of Hijab is every Muslim woman's right. It has been explained in the Muslim holy book (Qur-an) that it is obligatory upon every Muslim woman to guard their chastity and modesty. Thus, the wearing of hijab is not just wearing a piece of cloth but it is said to be their way of life. Through the proposed law, it is aimed to raise awareness and to put a stop to all sorts of discriminations, including discrimination against Muslim women.</p>
	HR 766	Rep. Adiong	Expressing heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso's initiative in constructing the first Muslim Cemetery in Manila	<p>The Committee adopted HR 766.</p> <p>Rep. Adiong, author of HR 766, said that he filed the resolution to recognize the remarkable initiative of Manila Mayor Domagoso in constructing the first Muslim Cemetery in Manila.</p> <p>In March 2020, the Mayor signed Ordinance No. 8608 allocating P49.3 million and setting aside 2,400 square meters of land inside the Manila South Cemetery for the construction of the Muslim Cemetery, which will be used exclusively for the interment of deceased Muslim residents of Manila. At present, with no cemetery for Muslims in the City of Manila, the body of a deceased Muslim would have to be transported to a burial place either in Taguig City, in Bulacan, or even in Mindanao.</p>

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Human Rights (Technical Working Group)	Draft Consolidated Bill on HBs 136, 4216, 4587, 4647, 4684, 5356, 5969, 6024, 6098 & 7217	Reps. Roman, Vargas, Abellanos, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Majority Leader Romualdez, Rep. Castelo, Minority Leader Abante, Deputy Speakers Villanueva and Hernandez, and Rep. Tutor	Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Jesus "Bong" Suntay (4th District, Quezon City), will deliberate further on the draft consolidated bill in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Suntay emphasized the importance of having in place a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that will stop discrimination; provide equal protection to all; prevent dehumanization of vulnerable individuals or communities; and ensure the respect for diversity.</p> <p>Among the amendments to the draft substitute bill that were approved during the meeting were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align the definition of "sexual

<p>Continuation... Human Rights (Technical Working Group)</p>				<p>orientation, gender identity and expression” (SOGIE) with the definition of the same term in RA 11166 (Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act) and the SOGIE Equality Bills that are filed in the House of Representatives;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmonize the definition of the other terms in the proposed law with existing local and international laws; • Indicate in the bill that the exercise of religion should not be an absolute right especially if such is inciting violence against the people or the State; • Include community service as one of the penalties for violating the provisions of the proposed law; and • Include the Presidential Human Rights Committee as one of the agencies that will be involved in the drafting of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the proposed law. <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their respective position papers on the draft consolidated bill for the TWG’s consideration.</p>
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