



Committee Daily Bulletin

18th Congress
Second Regular Session

A publication of the Committee Affairs Department

Vol. II No. 36
September 18, 2020

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"> Department of Health (DOH) and its attached agencies 	<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 DOH and DOJ.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Micaela Violago (2nd District, Nueva Ecija), sat as the presiding officer during the continuation of the deliberations on the DOH's proposed budget.</p> <p>Taking off from the Committee's first deliberation on the DOH's 2021 proposed budget, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III disclosed that the Department proposed a P45-billion budget for Health Facilities Enhancement Program (HFEP). Unfortunately, only P4.7 billion was approved under the 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP) which will be used for the purchase of medical equipment and vehicles. An additional P5.5 billion placed under unprogrammed funds was also approved for the infrastructure component of the HFEP. According to Duque, the budget cuts will have a big effect in DOH's implementation of the HFEP and the Universal Healthcare Law. He then requested for the support of Congress in augmenting the HFEP budget for 2021 with an additional P10 billion.</p> <p>Under the HFEP, healthcare facilities all over the country receive assistance from the national government for their infrastructure improvement and equipment upgrade.</p> <p>Based on the 2021 NEP, the DOH and its attached agencies is set to receive P204 billion for 2021, which is 27% higher than its current budget of P176 billion. The DOH-Office of the Secretary, with a budget of P127 billion, will get the biggest portion or 62% of the DOH's proposed budget, followed by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), with a budget of P67.35 billion (35%).</p> <p>Rep. Angelina "Helen" Tan, M.D. (4th District, Quezon) said that aside from the HFEP, the budget for COVID-19 response also needs to be increased to provide funds for adequate testing facilities, improved data management system, and better information technology structure. She said that many Filipinos were disappointed with the reporting system of DOH in relation to COVID-19 cases. Likewise, budget for other programs such as the immunization programs and those involving the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis, cancer, and mental health problems also need to be increased, she said. (Rep. Tan is the House's Committee on Health Chair.)</p> <p>Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) supported Rep. Tan's manifestation adding that the budget for mental health program, which only amounts to P650 million, is not enough for the country's population size. She added that mental health programs are particularly important during this time of pandemic.</p> <p>Party-List Reps. Carlos Isagani Zarate (BAYAN MUNA) and Sarah Jane Elago (KABATAAN) opined that the cuts in the DOH proposed budget for responding to the pandemic and improving</p>

Continuation...
Appropriations

the country's health system show that these are not among the priorities of the Duterte administration.

Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) expressed his disappointment over DOH's silence over the apparent demotion of nurses with the issuance of Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Circular 2020-4. Under the Circular, some nurse positions were downgraded although there was no diminution in their salaries. Rep. Gaité argued that although their salaries remained the same, there was a diminution in function and can therefore be regarded as a demotion.

Quirino Rep. Junie Cua asked about the status of COVID-19 vaccines and how the DOH plans to administer the vaccine to the public.

Duque said the DOH is currently in contact with several companies and governments that are interested in providing the country with COVID-19 vaccines as soon as they become available. Most of the pharmaceuticals the DOH is talking to are now on Phase 3 of their clinical trials, he added.

DOH Undersecretary for Public Health Services Team Myrna Cabotaje informed the Committee that the DOH will need about P12.9 billion to purchase the vaccines. She also said that the DOH has set aside P2.5 billion for the immunization of those considered to be "most at risk," which include medical frontliners, barangay health workers, and indigent senior citizens. The remaining amount needed will be loaned from the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), the payment for which will be sourced from the DOH's annual appropriations for the coming years.

Rep. Violago asked how long it will take for the vaccines to be available to the general public. DOH Undersecretary for Health Regulation Team Maria Rosario Vergeire explained that the regulatory process, which involves the approval of clinical trials by concerned government agencies, will only take around 44 days. She said that the Sub-technical Working Group for Vaccine Development headed by the Department of Science and Technology agreed to reduce the number of days for the regulatory process which is usually undertaken for more than 290 days.

Rep. Bernadette Herrera-Dy (Party-List, Bagong Henerasyon) asked if qualified beneficiaries can now be tested for COVID-19 in accredited Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) centers free of charge. Duque answered in the affirmative. PhilHealth Senior Vice President Nerissa Santiago added that qualified beneficiaries who already had themselves tested can apply for reimbursement as long as they present the required documents.

Members present also asked the Health Secretary several questions concerning the PhilHealth.

Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) asked for updates on PhilHealth's Interim Reimbursement Mechanism (IRM) which drew flaks from lawmakers for being a source of corruption and for various questionable releases.

Based on PhilHealth Circular No. 2020 -0007, the IRM is a "special privilege for the provision of substantial aid to an eligible Health Care Institution directly hit by fortuitous event with clear and apparent intent to continuously operate and/or rebuild the HCI in order to provide continuous health care services to adversely affected Filipinos."

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Justice (DOJ) and its attached agencies 	<p>Duque, who also acts as the Chairman of the PhilHealth Board, told the Committee that the IRM has been suspended and releases made through the IRM are currently being investigated. When asked if PhilHealth plans to reinstitute the IRM, Duque said that he wants to resolve the issues concerning its liquidation and legal basis first before coming up with a decision.</p> <p>Several Members expressed their concern over reports of the possible collapse of PhilHealth by 2021 due to the pandemic and the corruption within the agency that resulted in losses amounting to billions of pesos.</p> <p>Santiago assured the Committee that PhilHealth remains “very liquid,” adding that it still has around P213 billion in investible funds. Despite this, Duque admitted that PhilHealth was losing money, which could be attributed to the low influx of member contributions and an increase in payouts during the pandemic.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to terminate the deliberations on the proposed 2021 budget of the DOH and its attached agencies.</p> <p>Chair Yap initially presided over the deliberations on the budget of the DOJ and its attached agencies. But he later asked the Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Manuel Jose "Mannix" Dalipe (2nd District, Zamboanga City), to take over when the Members proceeded to ask questions pertaining to the DOJ's policies and programs.</p> <p>At the outset, DOJ Secretary Menardo Guevarra reported that the original budget proposal of the DOJ and its agencies was P33 billion but the DBM only approved a budget of P22.57 billion under the NEP.</p> <p>Chair Yap asked the Bureau of Immigration (BI) about measures implemented in airports to mitigate COVID-19 infection.</p> <p>BI Commissioner Jaime Morente said that the BI is using e-Gates machines which enhance its capability in conducting security checks and reduce physical contact between BI personnel and passengers. The e-Gates machines are capable of doing facial recognition, biometric scanning, bar code reading, and smart card recognition. In addition to this, the BI will also require airlines inbound to the Philippines to submit an advance copy of their passenger manifesto to facilitate the security evaluation of incoming passengers. The electronic submission of health declaration forms of departing and arriving passengers will also be implemented.</p> <p>Rep. Yap also sought an explanation regarding the report of the Commission on Audit (COA) stating that several international airline companies owe the BI over P272 million in administrative fines for allowing aliens lacking proper documents to board flights coming into the country. He said that the current administrative fine of P500 for each undocumented alien brought into the country will not deter airline companies from committing this offense. He recommended an increase in the administrative fines through legislation. Furthermore, he asked the BI to comment on the reported overcapacity of the detention center for aliens who are under investigation for possible deportation.</p> <p>With regard to the COA report, Morente agreed that a new immigration modernization law is needed that will increase the administrative fines and upgrade the BI's system for screening arriving foreign nationals. As for the crowded BI detention center temporarily located in a property owned by the Philippine National</p>
---------------------------------------	---	---

Continuation...
Appropriations

Police (PNP) in Bicutan, Morente said that new facilities may be constructed in this area. But, he said, the BI is looking for a place where it could build a permanent detention facility.

Rep. Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay) queried on the legality of granting absolute pardon to US Marine Lance Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton, who was convicted of killing a Filipino transgender woman, without recommendation from the Board of Pardons and Parole of the DOJ.

Secretary Guevarra replied that the grant of absolute pardon is within the authority of the President and that Pemberton was also credited with good conduct time under the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA) law since there was no record of him misbehaving in prison.

Rep. Brosas asked who paid for the expenses while keeping Pemberton in prison. Guevarra said that the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) did not spend much as the cost was mostly covered under the Visiting Forces Agreement.

Meanwhile, Rep. Zarate chided the DOJ over a report posted on its website tagging several party-list groups as having founded by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). He said that posting the report in DOJ's website means that the latter endorses the information it contained.

Guevarra explained that the 2020 Philippine Human Rights Situationer, the report that Rep. Zarate was referring to, was based on the inputs of different government agencies and that the Department of Foreign Affairs, which consolidated the report, requested the posting of the report in DOJ's website. He assured Rep. Zarate and the other party-list groups mentioned in the report that the DOJ does not have any policy on red-tagging and that it sticks to its mandate of resolving cases based on evidence.

DOJ Undersecretary Mark Perete added that the DOJ's participation in the report was limited to DOJ's Administrative Order 35 which created the inter-agency committee on extra-legal killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other grave violations of the right to life, liberty, and security of persons.

Rep. Elago inquired on the efforts of the DOJ to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation of children online.

DOJ Undersecretary and former Representative Emmeline Aglipay-Villar said that seminars are being conducted especially at the grassroots or barangay level nationwide to raise people's awareness of these issues. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DOJ is now conducting more webinars and using social media platforms, particularly on Facebook (where online sexual exploitation are mostly taking place), for its information campaign.

Rep. Janette Garin (1st District, Iloilo) questioned the competence of medico legal officers of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) who are conducting forensic autopsies to be used as evidence in court cases. She said that only certified pathologists are authorized to conduct autopsies and that this function should be exercised by the crime laboratories of the PNP and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and not the PAO.

PAO Chief Persida Rueda-Acosta said that the DBM has continuously approved the funding of PAO's forensics unit and that it is just merely performing its duties.

Continuation... Appropriations		<p>Several Members favor an increase in the proposed budget of the DOJ and its attached agencies, particularly the NBI, BuCor and PAO.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to terminate the deliberation on the proposed 2021 budget of the DOJ and its attached agencies.</p>
-----------------------------------	--	--

COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Labor and Employment	Substitute Bill to HB 2476	Rep. Taturan	Providing enhanced protection, security and benefits for media workers	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Enrico Pineda (Party-List, 1-PACMAN), approved the Committee Report on the Substitute Bill to HB 2476.</p> <p>Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), Chair of the Subcommittee on Labor Standards which drafted the substitute bill, reported that inputs given by the Members and resource persons present during the Subcommittee meetings were considered. However, the Subcommittee decided to elevate to the mother Committee the contentious provisions of the bill for its decision.</p> <p>After thorough deliberations, the Committee agreed on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media entities shall be required to provide insurance coverage to media workers and to pay for their premiums instead of a one-time payment of P100,000 for medical expenses; • The bill's Section 9 (Equal access to Public Information Fund) shall be deleted because it does not reflect the purpose of the bill; • The Department of Labor and Employment shall monitor the compliance of media entities with the provisions of the bill concerning minimum compensation for media workers (Section 5); security of tenure or regularization (Section 6); hazard pay (Section 7); and mandatory insurance benefits for media workers (Section 8); • The hazard pay for media workers shall be a minimum of P500; • Owners of media entities, including the franchise holder, shall be jointly and severally liable for any claims against media workers in connection with their work regardless of the nature of engagement, except when the media entity proves that it exercised due diligence, or if it is proven that the fault is attributable to the media worker alone; and • The specific details concerning the

Continuation... Labor and Employment				establishment of the proposed News Media Tripartite Council shall be laid down in the crafting of the proposed law's implementing rules and regulations (IRR).
--	--	--	--	--

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Information and Communications Technology (Technical Working Group)	Substitute Bill to HBs 38, 312, 4132 & 4367	Reps. Biazon, Salceda, Lacson, and Deputy Speaker Santos-Recto	Mandating the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) to require internet service providers to deliver a minimum standard of 10 megabits per second (10 mbps) for internet connection speed	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Muntinlupa City Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon, will present the substitute bill to the Mother Committee for its consideration and approval in its next meeting.</p> <p>In today's meeting, the TWG noted the comments and suggestions of the resource persons from the NTC, Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), Internet Society Philippines (ISOC.PH), Democracy.Net.PH, Smart Communications, Inc., and Globe Telecom, Inc.</p> <p>Among the points agreed upon for inclusion in the substitute bill were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a minimum internet speed of 10 mbps so that small internet service providers (ISPs) can comply but also authorize the NTC to adjust the minimum internet speed standard to at least 20 mbps for big ISPs; • Employ third party auditors to review the performance standards set by the NTC; • Future-proof the language of the proposed law and not constantly refer to the provisions of RA 7925 (Public Telecommunications Policy Act of the Philippines), considering that it is about the internet and should therefore be adaptive to the changes of the times; • Impose penalties for repeated violations and mandate the NTC to monitor the compliance of ISPs after the first offense or violation; and • Change the fixed amount of fine to the percentage of the gross annual income of erring ISPs.

Comments, suggestions and requests for copies may be sent to the Committee Publication Staff, Committee Management Support Service I, 3rd Floor, Ramon V. Mitra, Jr. Bldg., House of Representatives, Constitution Hills, Quezon City, through cmss1.cad@house.gov.ph or at tel. nos. 8932-6118/8931-5001 local 7122. Also available at <http://www.congress.gov.ph>