RESOLUTION FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES’ COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE COVID-19 RELATED DEATHS OF INMATES, INCLUDING HIGH-PROFILE PRISONERS, IN THE NEW BILIBID PRISON,

WHEREAS, last 20 July 2020, Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) spokesperson Colonel Gabriel Chaclag said that New Bilibid Prison (NBP) has recorded 343 cases of COVID-19 infections among inmates. Of this number, 311 have recovered and 19 have died;

WHEREAS, according to Jacqueline de Guia, spokesperson of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Commission will investigate the deaths of inmates due to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, local and international human rights and prison reform advocates and the family and friends of political prisoners have raised the alarm months ago that the cramped, overpopulated prisons are a hotbed for COVID-19 infections. Despite supposed mass releases to ease prison congestion, jail facilities remain a vector for infections;

WHEREAS, recently, the report by the BuCor officials that high-profile inmates, particularly known drug lords like Jaybee Sebastian, also died from COVID-19, raised not only concerns but even suspicions from the public because of the apparent lack of transparency surrounding the circumstances of these supposed deaths that supposedly dates back months ago while Metro Manila was in total lockdown;

WHEREAS, some of the reported infected inmates came from Building 14 — a highly secured facility for high-profile prisoners. Building 14 has less inmates, have separate cells, and better distancing than the general prison population, yet, had a higher reported percentage of infections and deaths;

WHEREAS, BuCor Director General Gerald Bantag refused to confirm if Sebastian indeed died of Covid-19, citing Republic Act 10173 or the “Data Privacy Act of 2012”. However, the Department of Justice said the BuCor has confirmed that Sebastian—a high-profile inmate who implicated De Lima to the illegal drug trade in Bilibid—was among those who supposedly succumbed to the virus;

WHEREAS, the death certificates of other high-profile inmates released by the BuCor on 22 July 2020, include: Amin Imam Boratong, Eugene Ho Chua, Francis Go, Benjamin Marcelo, Sherwin Sanchez, Willy Yang, and Shuli Zhang. A notice of death was presented for the ninth fatality, Hung Kin Sing Jimmy, also known as Jimmy Ang. All of these deaths, except for Francis Go were supposedly due to COVID-19 infections according to the documents presented to the media. Go’s cause of death, however, are hypoxia and severe pneumonia, complications also attributed to COVID-19;

WHEREAS, Marcelo, Chua, Boratong and Sebastian are among the so-called "Bilibid 19" — a group of high-profile convicts who were found with drugs and other contraband items during a controversial raid under De Lima’s term in 2014;

WHEREAS, prisoners’ rights group Kapatid pointed out that without complete reports, "families are kept in the dark and forced to grapple with fear—which could be avoided only if prison officials will tell the truth."

WHEREAS, the curious case of deaths of these inmates warrant the close and thorough investigation of government bodies, including the House of Representatives as it traverses the many issues of our jail facilities including dire health and sanitary conditions, high rate of prisoner deaths, organized crime, drug trade, freedom-for-sale, pseudocide or fake deaths, among other issues;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the House of Representatives, through the Committee on Justice, conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation on the COVID-19 deaths of inmates, including high profile prisoners, in the New Bilibid Prison.

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5 Ibid
Approved,

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