WHEREAS, on June 8, 2021, Senator Panfilo Lacson disclosed that an undersecretary of an unnamed executive department is putting up at least two (2) troll farms in every province in the Philippines.¹ He further claimed that the plan was uncovered after one of his former employees was asked to help out in the project;

WHEREAS, while Sen. Lacson did not name the undersecretary involved, he, however, said that government resources might have been used for the project;

WHEREAS, a troll farm or troll factory is an institutionalized group of Internet trolls that seeks to interfere in political opinions and decision-making. One study² showed that some 30 governments worldwide paid keyboard armies to spread propaganda and attack critics. Governments use paid commentators, trolls, and bots to harass journalists and erode trust in the media³;

WHEREAS, Presidential spokesman Harry Roque was quick to deny the Palace’s involvement or knowledge on the accusation. Recall, however, that in 2019 Facebook took down 220 Facebook Pages, 73 Facebook accounts and 29 Instagram accounts because of “coordinated inauthentic behavior.”⁴ Twinmark is the company behind Trending News Portal, the top website shared by former Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Assistant Secretary Mocha Uson, according to data gathered by Rappler⁵;

WHEREAS, in March 2019, Nathaniel Gleicher, Head of Cybersecurity Policy of Facebook, attributed the “coordinated inauthentic behavior” to a network organized by one Nick Gabunada, who was identified as President Duterte’s social media handler in the 2016 elections,° despite attempts to cover their tracks;

WHEREAS, the Philippines has become a haven for Internet trolls.° The young, educated, English-speaking workforce that made the Philippines a global call center hub has become a go-to center for influencing political campaigns;

WHEREAS, the use of government funds to such projects is not only a reprehensible but also an illegal of the people’s money. Government officials involved in this sinister act that aims to undermine and subvert our democratic processes should be revealed, exposed and be subject to a prompt and impartial investigation;

WHEREAS, in 2019, Internet troll companies are paid as much as $38,000 to $57,000 per month (₱1,900,000 – ₱2,850,000) according to an investigative report made by the Washington Post.° Millions of the people’s money is possibly being used to finance such nefarious activities on the Internet;

WHEREAS, the manipulation of information in social media threatens Internet freedoms. The use of paid commenters and bots to spread anti-democratic propaganda and suppress dissent is dangerous to our democracy and people. Red tagging of activists, government critics, and even opposition government officials are prevalent in social media, and even in official government social media sites. Red tagging has resulted in actual killings or incarceration of many, including activists, lawyers, and other government critics. More importantly, these troll farms that deliberately peddle lies and disinformation clearly undermine and subvert our democratic processes and institutions, which, Congress should not only denounce but should stop.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the House Committee on Public Information, conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation, on the alleged building of internet troll farms for the 2022 elections with the use of public funds by an undersecretary of the executive department.

Adopted,

REP. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. FERDINAND R. GAITE
Bayan Muna Partylist

REP. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT
Bayan Muna Partylist

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° Ibid