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AGENCY BRIEFING

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
Overseas Workers Affairs	Discussion on the prioritization of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the COVID-19 vaccination program of the government	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), continued its discussion on the request of OFWs that they be given higher priority in the government's COVID-19 vaccination program.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza said that some foreign countries have already opened up their economy and are again accepting migrant workers, but with the condition that the OFWs should first get vaccinated against COVID-19 prior to deployment. Hence, he relayed to concerned government agencies the appeal of the OFWs to categorize them as essential workers and move them up in the vaccination priority list from tenth (B-5) to fourth (A-4). He asked the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases to urgently act on this request so that the OFWs are able to return to work at the soonest possible time.</p> <p>Party-List Reps. Alberto "Bobby" Pacquiao (OFW FAMILY), Ferdinand Gaité (BAYAN MUNA), and Macnell Lusotan (MARINO) maintained their position that the OFWs be included among the priority groups that will be vaccinated first.</p> <p>Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said that although he understands the concerns of the Members and resource persons, the government's vaccination program should be understood in the context of scarcity. As much as the government wants to vaccinate everyone at the earliest time, Duque said its main goal is to protect those who are considered to be at a very high risk of contracting and succumbing to the virus. Nevertheless, he agreed with the suggestion of the Committee and assured the Members that he will personally bring the matter to the attention of the IATF in its next meeting on March 29. He added that OFWs who are health care workers can be included in the first category, while those who are already senior citizens and with comorbidities may be included in the second and third categories, respectively.</p> <p>DOH Disease Prevention and Control Bureau (DPCB) OIC-Director Razel Nikka Hao also said that due to competing global demand for the vaccines, the country could not readily procure enough number of doses so it has to resort to prioritization. At the top of the priority list for the National COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Program are workers in frontline health services (A-1), followed by senior citizens (A-2), persons with comorbidities (A-3), frontline personnel in essential sectors (A-4), and indigent population (A-5).</p> <p>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration Administrator Bernard Olalia, as well as the resource persons from the Joint Manning Group, Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines, and Association of Licensed Manning Agencies expressed their support for the call to move up the OFWs in the order of priorities under the government's vaccination program.</p> <p>When asked to give an update on the rollout of the government's vaccination program, Duque said inoculation has already started and that aside from the 1.5 million doses that already arrived, the government is expecting an additional one million doses to arrive on Monday, March 29.</p>