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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Creative Industry and Performing Arts (Special Committee)	HR 1801	Rep. De Venecia	Inquiry into the state of the Philippine fashion and textile industries and other related industries	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Christopher de Venecia (4th District, Pangasian), terminated its inquiry relative to House Resolution 1801.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. De Venecia, author of HR 1801, stated that today's meeting will be the final part of the inquiry into the state of the Philippine fashion and textile industries. He said that the Committee resolved to identify policy gaps and propose legislative interventions to reverse the declining state of these industries.</p> <p>Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Assistant Secretary Eduardo Meñez, Design Center of the Philippines (DCP) Executive Director Rhea Matute, and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) - Bureau of Trade and Industrial Policy Research Director Janet Cuenca made their respective presentations on the current state of the Philippine textile industry, and their respective projects and initiatives on the development and promotion of Philippine textile.</p> <p>Meñez highlighted the DFA's initiative in promoting Philippine textile overseas, such as the conduct of <i>Hibla ng Lahi</i> Traveling Exhibition, which showcases the unique qualities of the piña cloth and the country's traditional textiles.</p> <p>Likewise, the representatives from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) presented statistical reports on the labor force composed of highly skilled workers, freelancers, and indigenous artisans.</p> <p>On the other hand, the stakeholders from the Philippine Fashion Coalition (PFC), Philippine Exporters Confederation, Inc. (PhilExport), fashion designers, and entrepreneurs in the field of native and traditional design, embroidery, weaving, photography and footwear, shared information on their crafts, business experiences, and current situation.</p> <p>NCIP Commissioner Jennifer Sibug-Las spoke of the need for indigenous people (IP) artisans to receive technical assistance to improve their entrepreneurial skills in order to benefit more from their products and expand their production. She added that IPs should receive proper credit</p>

<p>Continuation... Creative Industry and Performing Arts (Special Committee)</p>				<p>and a fair share in the profits derived from the sale of their products or use of their designs.</p> <p>PhilExport Advocacy, Communications and Special Concerns Vice President Flordeliza Leong explained the challenges that have impeded the continuous growth of the creative industry, such as shortage of raw materials; difficulty in accessing credit facilities; high costs of power and logistics; lack of technical skills and knowledge; and restrictions in mobility due to the pandemic.</p> <p>PFC Chairperson Carissa Evangelista and members of the PFC presented their recommendations, among which are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the gaps in the supply chain in the fashion and textile industry, both local and foreign; • Create awareness and induce preference on the purchase of local goods; • Review of the Retail Trade Liberalization Act of 2000 (Republic Act 8762) to lower the prescribed minimum capital for foreign investments in the country; • Allow curriculum creation and mapping to focus on skills and knowledge that can be converted to actual jobs to minimize underemployment; • Create an “easy pay” or express tax filing system, preferably online, for all entrepreneurs and companies that file less than P1 million in taxes annually; and • Provide tax incentives for a minimum of two years to a maximum of five years to all micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that register under a “to be identified category” of Philippine fashion in order to kick-start growth and development. <p>Commenting on the difficulties encountered by designers in going through the process of intellectual property registration, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines gave its assurance that it will extend proper assistance to the designers in this regard. The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) also promised to provide easy registration process for the creative industry sector.</p> <p>Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) cited reports of MSMEs not availing themselves of loans provided to them under the Bayanihan 2 law. Leong said that MSMEs are discouraged to take out loans at this time of pandemic because of the uncertainty of the business environment.</p> <p>Sharing the same position as Leong, PFC member Carmina Sanchez-Jacob added that</p>
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<p>Continuation... Creative Industry and Performing Arts (Special Committee)</p>				<p>MSMEs opted instead to receive grants from the government to stay afloat or jumpstart their businesses. She pointed out that MSMEs find it hard to manage their cash flow to cover operation costs, pay wages of employees, and repay loans.</p> <p>Reps. Quimbo and Sharon Garin (Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA) expressed their frustration over this situation, adding that both of them fought hard to ensure the availability of credit under Bayanihan 2 for the MSMEs.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Quimbo on the need to hire additional staff to address the lack of commercial attaches who can provide assistance to industry sectors in sourcing raw materials abroad, Maria Teresa Loring, chief trade and industry development specialist of the DTI's Export Marketing Bureau, said that her office will study the proposal of Rep. Quimbo.</p> <p>Kabataan Party-List Rep. Sarah Jane Elago suggested that the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Philippine Textile Research Institute (PTRI) should collaborate with each other in order to address the shortage of raw materials for the creative industry sector. She also recommended that a dialogue be held between the creative industry sector and the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) on the required work protocols in the light of the pandemic.</p> <p>Rep. De Venecia requested the assistance of Rep. Elago in setting up a town hall meeting between the creative industry sector and the IATF on work protocols.</p> <p>The DOST and DTI were requested to submit to the Committee their respective reports on the status of the establishment of fabrication laboratories (Fablabs) in the country. The FabLab is a one-stop workplace that offers technical prototyping, design, and digital fabrication workshops to turn innovative ideas into reality. The FabLab is a product of the collaboration between the DOST and the DTI. (Source: DTI website)</p>
<p>Government Enterprises and Privatization jt. w/ Public Information</p>	<p>HB 1952</p> <p>HBs 8001 & 8012</p>	<p>Rep. Cabochan</p> <p>Rep. Baronda and Deputy Speaker Pichay</p>	<p>Establishing an independent broadcast system in the country, providing funds therefor</p> <p>Establishing the People's Broadcasting Corporation, abolishing the People's Television Network, Inc.</p>	<p>The Joint Committee, co- chaired by Rep. Eric Olivarez (1st District, Parañaque City), Chair of the Committee on Government Enterprises and Privatization, and Rep. Joseph "Jojo" Lara (3rd District, Cagayan), Chair of the Committee on Public Information, agreed to create a technical working group to consolidate House Bills 1952, 8001 and 8012.</p> <p>Rep. Olivarez said that the three bills seek to convert the People's Television Network, Inc. (PTNI) into a world class news and information network and to further define its identity and role as the flagship broadcast system of the government. While the PTNI is categorized as a</p>

<p>Continuation... Government Enterprises and Privatization jt. w/ Public Information</p>				<p>government-owned and controlled cooperation (GOCC), Rep. Olivarez stressed that "it is accountable to its ultimate owner – the Filipino people."</p> <p>Rep. Lara likewise said that the proposed law aims to establish an independent broadcast system that will replace the existing PTNI and provide adequate funds for its operation and modernization. He added that the bills envision a public broadcasting company that is free from political and commercial interest; and shall provide the public accurate, truthful, and unbiased information.</p> <p>Rep. Manuel Cabochan III (Party-List, MAGDALO), author of HB 1952, stated that his bill seeks to create the Public Service Broadcast System (PSBS), which shall be independent in all matters concerning broadcast content. It shall also have fiscal autonomy and shall have the independence of a Constitutional commission. The members of the PSBS Board shall not be appointed by the President.</p> <p>Rep. Cabochan explained that in the Philippines, media has been dominated by privately-owned companies that depend on advertising to sustain themselves. Meanwhile, the existing public broadcast system has been perceived by the people as a propaganda vehicle of the incumbent administration. Cognizant of this, it must be ensured that information should be channeled through truly independent media, away from commercial interests and even government control, he added.</p> <p>Expressing support for the bills were resource persons from the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), PTNI, Office of the Government Corporate Counsel, Governance Commission for GOCCs, Department of Information and Communications Technology, and National Telecommunications Commission.</p> <p>PCOO Undersecretary Kristian Ablan said that the PCOO, since 2016, has been advocating the passage of a law that will revitalize the PTNI, an attached agency of the PCOO. He is optimistic that in this 18th Congress, the proposed law will finally be passed.</p> <p>Among the three bills, Ablan said that the PCOO favors HBs 8001 and 8012 as they respond to the needs of the PCOO. He informed the Committee that the PCOO had discussions with the authors of HBs 8001 and 8012 when they were being crafted.</p> <p>When asked about the PCOO's comments, Rep. Cabochan said he is amenable to make HBs 8001 and 8012 as the reference bills in the deliberations of the proposed law.</p> <p>Meanwhile, PTNI General Manager Kat de Castro said that for years, the PTNI has had to</p>
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<p><i>Continuation...</i> Government Enterprises and Privatization jt. w/ Public Information</p>				<p>deal with the stigma of being the propaganda machine of the government. She is hopeful that with the passage of the proposed law, the PTNI will be the new "People's Broadcasting Corporation" (PBS) which will be independent like the British Broadcasting Corporation of United Kingdom, Australian Broadcasting Corporation of Australia, and the NHK of Japan. De Castro, however, requested the Joint Committee to have a provision in the proposed law that will ensure the security of tenure of its existing personnel during the transition.</p> <p>Likewise, Ablan said that the PCOO already submitted a position paper requesting the inclusion in the bill of a provision stating that regular employees of the PTNI shall be absorbed by the PBC upon the former's abolition.</p> <p>Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) advised PCOO to not only look after the welfare of the regular employees but also of those who have been working in the PTNI for so long but are not yet given a permanent employment status.</p> <p>Reps. Zarate and France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) sought assurance that the new broadcast system will not be used as a propaganda arm of the incumbent.</p> <p>Ablan replied that HBs 8001 and 8012 clearly provide that the proposed PBS will exercise editorial independence so that it can distance itself from the influence of the existing administration.</p> <p>To ensure the independence of the proposed broadcast network, Rep. Cabochan asked the Committee to consider his bill's proposal that the Board members of the new broadcast agency shall not be appointed by the President.</p> <p>Under HBs 8001 and 8012 the members of the Board of PBC will be appointed by the President.</p>
<p>Senior Citizens (Special Committee)</p>	<p>HR 656</p>	<p>Rep. Datol (dec.)</p>	<p>Investigation into the alleged anomalous and illegal delay or lack of disbursement of the social pension fund to senior citizens</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Rodolfo Ordanes (Party-List, SENIOR CITIZENS), will continue its investigation relative to House Resolutions 656 and 1791 in another meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Ordanes, who is also the author of HR 1791, said that in today's meeting, the Committee will continue the discussion of issues regarding the disbursement of the social pension fund under the SPISC Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). He said the DSWD needs to know the problems being encountered by senior citizens (SCs) so that it can improve the implementation of the SPISC Program pursuant to Republic Act 9994 or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010.</p> <p>RA 9994 provides that indigent SCs shall be entitled to a monthly stipend of P500.00 to help</p>
	<p>HR 1791</p>	<p>Rep. Ordanes</p>	<p>Investigation into the validation and screening of senior citizen pensioners of the Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens (SPISC) Program</p>	

<p>Continuation... Senior Citizens (Special Committee)</p>				<p>defray the costs of their daily subsistence and medical needs.</p> <p>As stated in HR 656, there were reports of delays in the disbursement of the SPISC fund in 2019 amounting to P23 billion, which was supposed to benefit about 3.79 million SCs. Similarly, HR 1791 states that some SCs were arbitrarily and unjustly excluded in the list of SPISC beneficiaries despite being previously qualified for the program due to alleged wrong application of RA 9994 and other issuances of the DSWD that are inconsistent with the law.</p> <p>DSWD Undersecretary for Policy and Plans Luzviminda Ilagan said that the DSWD welcomes the initiative of the Committee to look into the status of implementation of the SPISC program, adding that it remains committed to ensuring the protection of the rights and welfare of SCs.</p> <p>DSWD Program Management Bureau (PMB) Director Wilma Naviamos explained that the exclusion of some SCs in the list of SPISC beneficiaries could have resulted from the revalidation of SPISC beneficiaries and the cleanup of SPISC database pursuant to a Presidential directive and a memorandum from the DSWD Secretary issued in October 2018.</p> <p>She said right now, the DSWD follows a revalidation process based on DSWD Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 04 series of 2019 (Omnibus Guidelines in the Implementation of the SPISC).</p> <p>Based on the guidelines, Naviamos elucidated that the DSWD field offices (FOs), with the support of the Office of the Senior Citizens Affairs (OSCA) and the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), conduct the revalidation of existing beneficiaries using the data collected from the Social Pension Beneficiary Update Form (SPBUF) filled out by the SCs. The data, which are encoded into the social pension information system, are "cleaned" by the DSWD-PMB. She explained that the cleaning process involves duplicity checks and crossmatching with the respective lists of pensioners submitted by the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office and the Government Service Insurance System. After which, Naviamos said the clean list is endorsed to the DSWD FOs for the eventual release of social pension to the beneficiaries.</p> <p>Naviamos reported that as of June 30, about 2.63 million of about 4.41 million SPISC beneficiaries have already been served by the DSWD FOs. She also informed the body that the DSWD has partnered with the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) for the production of cash cards which will be used in the distribution of social pension to the beneficiaries.</p> <p>Further, Naviamos said the DSWD has already drafted the amendment to MC No. 4 in order to</p>
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<p>Continuation... Senior Citizens (Special Committee)</p>				<p>change the schedule of social pension payouts from semestral to quarterly, as proposed in HR 1047, which was adopted by the Committee on March 4.</p> <p>Liga ng OSCA Heads ng Pilipinas Inc. Executive Vice President Rod Cinco said the explanation of the DSWD helped clarify issues concerning the validation or screening of SPISC beneficiaries.</p> <p>On the other hand, resource persons representing OSCA from various localities and SC associations and federations raised the following issues regarding the implementation of the SPISC: slow revalidation process for existing beneficiaries; delays in the payout of social pension; exclusion of qualified beneficiaries from the clean list; and changing of venues for the payouts, among others.</p> <p>Naviamos attributed the cause of delays in the revalidation process and payout of social pension since 2020 to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the activities of the DSWD central and field offices. She added that the pandemic also prompted the implementation of additional programs, such as the Social Amelioration Program, which reduced the workforce of the SPISC program.</p> <p>For senior citizens who have been excluded in the clean list, Naviamos advised them to report this to their respective DSWD FOs for the latter's appropriate action. She also mentioned that the social pension of SCs, who have died but are already included in the clean list, can be claimed by their beneficiaries, such as their spouse or children.</p> <p>With regard to the changes in venues for social pension payouts, DSWD National Capital Region Director Vicente Gregorio Tomas admitted that the DSWD is faced with challenges in selecting venues that are safe and convenient for the SCs.</p> <p>Rep. Ordanes said he is hopeful that all the issues and concerns on the implementation of the SPISC Program will be addressed when RA 11350 or the National Commission of Senior Citizens (NCSC) Act is fully implemented.</p> <p>RA 11350, which was signed into law on July 25, 2019, created the NCSC which shall ensure the full implementation of laws, policies, and programs pertinent to SCs.</p> <p>Asked by the Members on the status of the transfer to the NCSC of all functions, programs, projects, and activities of the DSWD pertaining to indigent SCs, Naviamos replied that the transfer is already in progress. In the meantime, she assured the body that the DSWD will try to quickly resolve all other issues concerning the implementation of the SPISC.</p>
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Revision of Laws	HB 2321	Rep. Torres-Gomez	Expanding the coverage of RA 10627, otherwise known as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla (2nd District, Zambales), decided to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate House Bills 2321 and 2697.</p> <p>Rep. Lucy Torres-Gomez (4th District, Leyte), author of HB 2321, was designated as head of the TWG.</p> <p>Rep. Deloso-Montalla thanked the resource persons for attending today's meeting as she enjoined them to give their comments and recommendations on the bills in order to come up with a responsive piece of legislation.</p> <p>HB 2321 seeks to include in the coverage of Republic Act 10627 acts of bullying perpetrated by a child or children directed at another child even if committed in out-of-school contexts. The bill also provides that a child shall refer to persons below 18 years old or those over but are incapable or unable to fully take care of themselves.</p> <p>Likewise, HB 2697 aims to expand the coverage of the law by including bullying committed by students against teachers and non-teaching personnel.</p> <p>Department of Education (DepEd) Legal Affairs' Child Rights Senior Officer Gil Anthony Aquino said that the offenses being proposed in the two bills are already covered under RA 9344 or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act. Nevertheless, he suggested that the proposed law should cover all learners regardless of age who are within the school setting as well as children below 18 years outside the school setting.</p> <p>On the other hand, Aquino objected to the proposal to include "child-to-teacher/non-teaching personnel bullying" in the coverage of RA 10627 as this is already beyond the intent of the law. He stressed that the law recognizes the fact that even child-perpetrators can be considered as victims in such a situation because they are deemed to have not been given proper guidance as children.</p> <p>Department of Social Welfare and Development social welfare officer Cheryl Mainar suggested that Section 5 (Mechanisms to Address Bullying) of HB 2321 be amended to mandate law enforcement agencies, instead of local social welfare officers, to implement policies governing instances of non-school related acts of bullying.</p> <p>The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) representative, Atty. Richel Abelida, agreed with Mainar's suggestion.</p> <p>University of the Philippines (UP) Law Center Professor Donna Manlangit said that the proposed law should uphold the state policies and principles embodied in other laws that provide preferential treatment to children, such</p>
	HB 2697	Rep. Panotes	Expanding the definition of the "Acts of Bullying" to include bullying committed by students against teachers or non-teaching personnel, amending for the purpose RA 10627	

Continuation... Revision of Laws				<p>as RA 9344, as amended. She stressed the importance of encouraging educational institutions, government agencies, families, and communities to work together for the prevention of juvenile delinquencies.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their respective position papers to the Committee.</p>
HBs 280, 2945 & 4515	Reps. Albano, Fariñas (Ria Christina), and Nograles (J.J.)	Amending Section 13 of RA 3019, as amended, otherwise known as Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (by providing an exception to the imposition of preventive suspension against public officers who are no longer connected with the office wherein the offense charged was committed)		<p>The Committee agreed to create a TWG to consolidate the six bills.</p> <p>Rep. Jericho Jonas Nograles (Party-List, PBA), author of HB 4515, was designated to head the TWG.</p> <p>Ombudsman Samuel Martirez said that the proposal to amend Section 13 of RA 3019, which pertains essentially to the suspension of public officers, is the concern of the Sandiganbayan more than the Office of the Ombudsman.</p>
HB 5604	Rep. Abu	Amending Sections 11 and 14 of RA 3019 (by removing the first sentence of Section 14 of RA 3019 to eliminate confusion in the implementation of this law and by making the offenses punishable under this law as imprescriptible)		<p>It was noted during the meeting that the following agencies and entities have not yet submitted their official position papers on the bills: Department of Justice (DOJ), Public Attorney's Office, Philippine National Police (PNP), NBI, and the UP Law Center.</p>
HB 8357	Rep. Villafuerte	Amending Section 13 of RA 3019, on its non-application to impeachable public officers		
HB 8543	Rep. Baronda	Increasing the penalties under RA 3019, as amended		
HBs 2852 & 3466	Reps. Villaraza-Suarez and Villafuerte	Considering rice or corn hoarding and profiteering during or on the occasion of any calamity or emergency declared as such by the President as economic sabotage, amending for the purpose RA 7581, otherwise known as the Price Act		<p>The Committee agreed to create a TWG to fine-tune the three bills.</p> <p>Department of Trade and Industry Assistant Secretary Ann Claire Cabochan expressed support for the bills making hoarding and profiteering of rice and corn during times of calamity or emergency as economic sabotage.</p>
HB 3687	Rep. Mendoza	Declaring buying or selling of exportable cavendish bananas from contracted farms to a non-party to the contract as economic sabotage, prescribing penalties for violation thereof		<p>While Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Ernesto Gonzalez supports the intent of the bills, he noted, however, that there are already enough laws which penalize acts that are tantamount to economic sabotage, including the hoarding of various agricultural products. Unfortunately, these laws are not properly and fully enforced, he added.</p> <p>Also expressing support for the bills were representatives from the DOJ, PNP, Department of National Defense, Department of the Interior and Local Government, National Food Authority, and the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association, Inc. They committed to submit their respective position papers on the bills.</p> <p>The Committee will invite representatives from the local government leagues that comprise the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines to attend the TWG meetings.</p>

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Special Committee on Persons with Disabilities (Technical Working Group)	HB 7180	Rep. Arroyo (M.L.)	Providing emergency health grant to persons with disabilities (PWDs) during the COVID-19 crisis and providing funds therefor	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Dahlia Loyola (5th District, Cavite), will prepare the substitute bill to the four bills.</p> <p>Rep. Loyola underscored the importance of the four bills which all seek to provide financial assistance and social protection to PWDs. She said it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that marginalized sectors of society, such as the PWDs, are given appropriate attention, especially during this pandemic.</p> <p>The TWG took note of the comments and suggestions of the resource persons from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), and National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC).</p> <p>Among the recommendations that were adopted by the TWG during the meeting were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt and consolidate the sections on the Definition of Terms under House Bills 7180 and 8220 and align them with the definitions under Republic Act 7277, as amended, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWDs; • Grant PWDs a 20% discount on COVID-19 RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction) test; • Include in the coverage of the proposed law all PWDs and not just those who are indigent or belonging to low-income families; • Specify in the proposed law that the disability support allowance shall be increased yearly and shall be given to PWDs on top of all other government funded benefits that they are currently receiving; and • Include the local government units in the list of agencies that shall work together to develop the Disability Data Management System, which shall serve as the database of all PWDs in the country. <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their additional recommendations for the TWG's consideration in drafting the substitute bill.</p>
	HB 7571	Rep. Tutor	Institutionalizing the provision of financial assistance, social pension, and financial protection for Filipino persons with disabilities	
	HB 8220	Rep. Vargas	Providing for the universal disability support allowance for PWDs, appropriating funds therefor	
	HB 9243	Rep. Baronda	Granting additional benefits to PWDs, amending for the purpose RA 7277, as amended	
	HB 1393	Rep. Vargas	Expanding the benefits and privileges of PWDs, amending Sections 32 and 33 of RA 7277, as amended, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for PWDs	
HB 2806	Deputy Speaker Rodriguez	Granting PWDs who are self-employed a 70% government subsidy for their monthly	According to the Committee Secretary, the six bills were already approved by the mother	

Continuation... Special Committee on Persons With Disabilities (Technical Working Group)			premium contributions to the Social Security System (SSS) for the first three months of coverage, amending for the purpose RA 7277	Committee. Deputy Speaker Rufus Rodriguez (2 nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), author of HB 2806, said his bill recognizes the efforts of self-employed PWDs by granting them 70% government subsidy for their monthly premium contributions to the SSS for the first three years of coverage. He added that with social security coverage, PWDs will be better prepared to handle exigencies in times of sickness and during old age. Expressing their support for the bills were the DSWD, NCDA, and NAPC.
	HB 3683	Majority Leader Romualdez	Providing for an early optional retirement for disabled persons working in government	
	HB 4187	Rep. Olivarez	Exempting PWDs from the payment of parking fees in all commercial establishments and government buildings that charge parking fees, thereby amending Section 32 of RA 7277, as amended	
	HBs 7907 & 8328	Rep. Cabochan	Granting birthday cash gift amounting to P1,000 to registered PWDs	

DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Overseas Workers Affairs	<p>Discussion on issues affecting overseas Filipino workers (OFWs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repatriation of OFWs 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), discussed with concerned agencies certain issues and concerns affecting OFWs amid the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza said the Committee wants to know the progress of government's interventions in addressing the problems being faced by OFWs not only those who are deployed overseas but even those who are in the country right now.</p> <p>Reporting on the status of the ongoing repatriation of OFWs affected by the pandemic, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Consul General Jose Cabrera III said that as of July 28, a total of 405,769 OFWs (300,163 land-based workers and 105,606 sea-based workers) have been repatriated by the DFA since March 2020 or at the onset of the pandemic. He added that about 4,960 OFWs are expected to be repatriated by next month through DFA-chartered flights. This batch will include vulnerable OFWs, such as the sick, elderly, and pregnant women, and those with expired visas and residence permits.</p> <p>Rep. Macnell Lusotan (Party-List, MARINO) asked the DFA to fast-track the repatriation of OFWs who have been stranded abroad for almost a year. Cabrera assured Rep. Lusotan that the DFA will give priority to their repatriation.</p> <p>Presenting the report of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Director John Rio Bautista stated that 49,919 displaced OFWs still need to be repatriated while 84,048 displaced OFWs have decided to remain on site or in the country where they work. He also said that 23,121 OFWs have been infected with COVID-19, including 1,181 who died. Further, he reported that the total financial assistance extended to displaced OFWs under DOLE's <i>Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong sa OFWs</i> (AKAP) Program has already reached P5.25 billion thus far.</p> <p>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Administrator Hans Leo Cacdac discussed OWWA's financial, livelihood, educational, and calamity assistance programs for returning OFWs and their families.</p>

<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban on the deployment of healthcare workers (HCWs), particularly nurses 	<p>The Committee also gave the OFWs present during the meeting to personally speak about their problems and concerns pertaining to repatriation. The DOLE, DFA, and OWWA assured the OFWs that appropriate assistance will be extended to them.</p> <p>With regard to the reported deployment ban of HCWs, POEA Deputy Administrator Aristodes Ruaro apprised the Committee of the policy of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) on the matter. He recalled that in November 2020, the IATF had set a deployment cap of 5,000 for HCWs to ensure that hospitals in the country would have the needed manpower amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The IATF later increased the deployment cap for HCWs to 6,500 annually based on its Resolution 122 issued on June 17.</p> <p>According to Ruaro, as of June 2021, a total of 6,172 Filipino HCWs were already deployed abroad. He also mentioned that the POEA and DOLE have a pending request with the IATF to increase further the annual deployment ceiling for HCWs.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza stated that HCWs covered by government-to-government labor agreements are exempted from the deployment ceiling. He also said that the IATF should have made prior consultations with the stakeholders in the health sector before implementing the deployment cap. He stressed that the deployment cap prevents HCWs from seeking gainful employment abroad.</p> <p>Instead of imposing a deployment cap, Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asserted that the government should give better incentives to HCWs to encourage them to remain in the country and work in the health sector.</p> <p>Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) recommended that a resolution should be filed urging the IATF to either remove or increase further the deployment cap for HCWs.</p> <p>Committee Secretary Christopher Lomibao apprised the body that the Chair, Rep. Mendoza, has already filed House Resolution 2009, calling for an inquiry into the annual deployment cap for HCWs. He said the Committee is just awaiting the referral from the Committee on Rules.</p> <p>Filipino Nurses United vice president Eleanor Nolasco said that there are enough nurses in the country whom the government can tap to become part of the health workforce. She appealed for the lifting of the deployment cap to allow HCWs to find better-paying jobs abroad.</p> <p>Likewise, Philippine Association of Service Exporters, Inc. president Raquel Bracero shared that the annual deployment of HCWs before the pandemic ranged from 17,000 to 20,000 and 80% of them are nurses. She lamented that the deployment cap has prevented about 3,500 HCWs from leaving the country despite having complied with the job requirements and spending considerable amount of money for the application. She claimed that the non-deployment of these professionals translates to income loss amounting to at least P250 million.</p> <p>Ruaro said he will inform the DOLE Secretary of the appeal to lift the deployment cap, who may then bring the matter up in the IATF meeting.</p> <p>The Committee will invite again the IATF in its next meeting. This is already the second time that the IATF failed to attend the Committee's meetings on the issues affecting the OFWs.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in the issuance of passports of OFWs 	<p>Moving forward to the next item in the agenda, Rep. Mendoza said his office has been receiving complaints from OFWs on the difficulty of obtaining passport appointments with the DFA. He said there are reports that slots for earlier appointments for passport application or renewal are allegedly being sold for an exorbitant amount.</p> <p>DFA Passport Division Acting Director Marie Cris Chieng disclosed that the DFA is already investigating the alleged selling of slots for earlier appointments for passport application or renewal. Further, she made it clear that the DFA does not offer passport appointment slots through the social media and that the DFA has sought the help of the Philippine National Police in identifying and taking down social media accounts or sites involved in this illegitimate activity.</p> <p>DFA Consular Affairs Acting Executive Director Jabbar Adiong attributed the difficulty of booking appointments to the ongoing pandemic and the recurring imposition of strict quarantine protocols which continue to affect DFA's operations. He said alternative working arrangements and capacity restrictions had to be observed by the DFA to ensure compliance with health standards and social distancing protocols.</p> <p>According to Adiong, from a high of 13,074 appointment slots being offered daily by the DFA before the pandemic, the DFA can now only accommodate 6,167 appointment slots per day resulting in delays in passport issuance. To address the backlog, he said the DFA has opened five locations for its temporary offsite passport service (TOPS).</p> <p>Chieng added that the opening of the five TOPS allowed DFA to provide an additional 2,500 passport appointment slots per day. She said the TOPS will be implemented by DFA from July to December 2021.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the recruitment industry representatives recommended that a separate portal be made available for OFWs, especially the seafarers, to speed up the issuance of passports. Any delay in the issuance of passports to OFWs might lead to a loss of job opportunities.</p>
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