



Committee Daily Bulletin

18th Congress
Third Regular Session

A publication of the Committee Affairs Department

Vol. III No. 63
September 9, 2021

BUDGET BRIEFINGS

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2022 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission on Higher Education (CHED) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Eric Go Yap (Party-List, ACT-CIS), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2022 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the CHED, DOJ, DOLE, and OMB.</p> <p>The Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Francisco Jose "Bingo" Matugas II (1st District, Surigao del Norte), sat as the presiding officer during the deliberations on the CHED's FY 2022 proposed budget.</p> <p>Under the FY 2022 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the CHED is set to receive an amount of P52.60 billion which is 16.38% lower than its current budget of P62.90 billion. The CHED's 2022 proposed budget will be distributed as follows: maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P50.90 billion; Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF), P1.03 billion; personnel services (PS), P483.95 million; and capital outlay (CO), P195.88 million.</p> <p>CHED Chairperson J. Prospero de Vera III disclosed that the Commission's original budget proposal was P62.4 billion but was cut by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) by P9.61 billion.</p> <p>According to De Vera, because of the budget cut, the funding for the following programs was reduced: Free Higher Education Program under Republic Act 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education; the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education under RA 10687; and the Medical Scholarship and Return Service (MSRS) Program under RA 11509 or the Doktor Para sa Bayan Act. Likewise, the DBM scrapped the proposed funding for the upgrading of the facilities of state universities and colleges (SUCs) that have medical programs and the implementation of RA 11448 or the Transnational Higher Education Act. CHED's Information System Strategic Plan was not also funded under the DBM-approved budget of the Commission.</p> <p>Rep. Sarah Jane Elago (Party-List, KABATAAN) lamented the non-allocation of funds for the upgrading of SUCs' facilities offering medical programs and the budget cut for the medical scholarship for aspiring doctors in the country. She underscored that these programs should have been given priority in line with the government's efforts at combatting the ill-effects of the pandemic.</p> <p>The Doktor Para sa Bayan Act establishes a MSRS Program for deserving students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where no SUCs offer a medical course. <i>(Source: CHED website)</i></p> <p>Rep. Ron Salo (Party-List, KABAYAN), who is one of the authors of RA 11448, underscored the importance of funding</p>

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the implementation of the Transnational Higher Education Act which, he said, is designed to make the Philippine HEIs globally competitive and improve the country's human resource.

As defined under the RA 11448, "transnational higher education (TNHE) includes all types and modes of delivery of higher education study programs, sets of courses of study, or educational services, including distance education and study-abroad programs, which involve education systems of a State different from the State where a TNHE provider operates or programs which may operate independently of any national education system or where the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based."

Deputy Speaker Bernadette "BH" Herrera-Dy (Party-List, BH) asked about the status of the Tulong Dunong Program (TDP), a grants-in-aid under the Student Financial Assistance Programs (StuFAPs) of CHED for poor students who are enrolled or will enroll in public or private higher education institutions.

De Vera said that the fund for the TDP is now part of the CHED budget. Previously, the TDP fund was with the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Reps. Mark Go (Baguio City) and Hector Sanchez (Catanduanes) expressed their support for the restoration of the amount of P62.4 billion as the budget of CHED for FY 2022, as per its original proposal.

In response to the query of Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS), De Vera reported that 118 HEIs nationwide have been allowed to hold limited face-to-face classes in medical and allied health sciences courses. He said there is a proposal to allow the conduct of limited face-to-face classes in other courses such as engineering, hotel and restaurant management, tourism, and marine engineering and transportation if the HEIs offering them are in areas under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ).

On the other hand, Rep. Janette Garin (1st District, Iloilo) moved for the suspension of the deliberations on the proposed budget of CHED. She noted that several budget items of the Commission under the FY 2021 General Appropriations Act (GAA) are tagged as "For Later Release" (FLR). The DBM should explain the rationale for releasing CHED's 2021 budget in such manner, she said.

Upon the motion of Rep. Garin, the Committee suspended its deliberation on CHED's 2022 proposed budget.

The Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Ruwel Peter Gonzaga (2nd District, Davao de Oro), sat as the presiding officer during the deliberations on the FY 2022 proposed budget of the DOJ and its attached agencies.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra apprised the Committee that the original budget proposal of the DOJ is P51.68 billion but the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) only approved a budget of P24.83 billion under the National Expenditure Program (NEP) for FY 2022. He said the DBM-approved budget of the DOJ for 2022 is 7.49% higher than the current year's appropriation of P23.10 billion.

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DOJ Undersecretary Juliana Sunga reported that out of the P24.83 billion proposed budget of the DOJ for 2022, P7.49 billion will go to the Office of the Secretary (OSEC) and the rest will be distributed to the DOJ attached agencies as follows:

- Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) – P 5.26 billion;
- Public Attorney’s Office (PAO) – P4.75 billion;
- National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) – P1.97 billion;
- Bureau of Immigration (BI) – P1.59 billion;
- Land Registration Authority (LRA) – P1.16 billion;
- Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) – P1.15 billion;
- Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) – P1.01 billion;
- Office of the Government Corporate Counsel (OGCC) – P211 million;
- Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) – P160 million; and
- Office for Alternative Dispute Resolution (OADR) – P69 million.

By expense class, Sunga said the FY 2022 proposed budget of the DOJ will be distributed as follows: PS, P19.80 billion; MOOE, P4.64 billion; and CO, P390 million.

The DOJ’s major accomplishments in FY 2020, as reported by Sunga, include the following: increase in case disposition rate from 78.30% in 2013 to 91.23% in 2020; reduction of case backlogs to just 31.3% by the end of 2020; and increase in prosecution success rate from 68.3% in 2013 to 90.81% in 2020. (Prosecution success rate refers to total convictions secured as a percent of total convictions and acquittals during the period, excluding dismissals). She also reported the rates of accomplishment of the DOJ-OSEC and its attached agencies with regard to their respective programs.

Rep. Edgar Mary Sarmiento (1st District, Samar) noted the reduction in the budget of the NBI from P2.28 billion in 2021 to only P1.97 billion in 2022 NEP. He recommended that the budget of NBI for 2022 be restored to at least the same level as its current year’s appropriation of P2.28 billion. He also pointed out the need to give priority to the retrofitting of OSG buildings to make them safer from hazards such as earthquakes.

Party-List Reps. Arlene Brosas (GABRIELA), Argel Joseph Cabatbat (MAGSASAKA), and Carlos Isagani Zarate (BAYAN MUNA) also supported the proposal to restore the amount of the NBI’s 2022 budget back to the level of its 2021 budget.

House Committee on Justice Chair, Rep. Vicente “Ching” Veloso III (3rd District, Leyte), asked if the salary of BI’s workers on a job order basis are sourced from the Express Lane Fund (ELF) and how the BI is able to maintain it, considering the impact of the pandemic to travel and tourism.

BI Commissioner Jaime Morente confirmed that the salaries of these workers are sourced from the ELF which was established out of the proceeds from express lane fees and charges collected by the Bureau. Morente said that by virtue of Memorandum Circular No. 39, series of 2019, issued by the President, the BI is authorized to use the ELF to augment the salaries of its personnel.

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- Department of Labor and Employment

However, Morente admitted that due to travel restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, express lane fees and charges that accrue to the ELF have drastically decreased. In view of this, the BI would require an additional funding of P98 million to pay for the salaries of job order workers and to create additional plantilla positions for its contractual employees.

Rep. Veloso expressed his support for the BI to be given an additional budget of P98 million for FY 2022.

As regards the budget of OADR, Baguio City Rep. Mark Go manifested his support to augment this by P7 million.

On his part, Deputy Speaker Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City) supports an increase in the FY 2022 proposed budget of the DOJ and its attached agencies. He directed the DOJ to submit its proposal for its 2022 budget augmentation.

The Committee Vice Chair, Rep. David "Jay-Jay" Suarez (2nd District, Quezon), sat as the presiding officer during the deliberations on the FY 2022 proposed budget of the DOLE and its attached agencies.

DOLE Secretary Silvestre Bello III informed the body that under the FY 2022 NEP, the proposed budget of the DOLE is P44.37 billion, which is 21.2% higher than its current year's appropriation of P36.61 billion. Out of this proposed budget for FY 2022, P27.05 billion will go to the DOLE Proper and the rest will be distributed to the attached agencies of the DOLE as follows:

- Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) - P12.79 billion;
- Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) - P1.82 billion;
- National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) - P1.31 billion;
- Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) - P671.54 million;
- National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB) - P276.51 billion;
- National Wages and Productivity Commission (NWPC) - P246.61 million;
- National Maritime Polytechnic (NMP) - P134.96 billion; and
- Institute for Labor Studies (ILS) - P62.17 million.

By expense class, Bello said the 2022 proposed budget of the DOLE will be distributed as follows: MOOE, P37.61 billion; PS, P6.30 billion; CO, P448.79 million; and FE, P9.72 million.

The Labor Secretary also reported DOLE's major accomplishments for FY 2020 up to the first semester of 2021 under the following programs: Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program; COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP); Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong sa OFWs (AKAP) Program; Youth Employment Program; and several programs for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) covering their repatriation, protection during deployment, and protection upon return to the country.

For 2022, Bello said the thrusts and priorities of DOLE would focus on employment facilitation, protection of workers' rights and maintenance of industrial peace, and social protection for vulnerable workers.

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Deputy Speaker Herrera-Dy commended the DOLE's effective implementation of the TUPAD program, stating further that many Filipinos who lost their jobs because of the pandemic have truly benefited from the program. She remarked that it would be best to just transfer to the DOLE some of the funds intended for the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), given the latter's low budget utilization rates for 2020 and 2021 as compared to the DOLE.

Rep. Eufemia "Ka Femia" Cullamat (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked about the status of the P64.4 million unliquidated funds intended for sugar industry workers affected by the pandemic that was flagged by the Commission on Audit (COA) in its 2020 audit report on the DOLE.

DOLE Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns (BWSC) Director Ma. Karina Perida-Trayvilla clarified that the P64.4 million was released for the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) subsidy for biofuel and sugar workers. She said out of the P64.4 million, P49 million was allocated for sugar workers and the rest was allocated for biofuel workers. She reported that P42.8 million of the P49 million was already liquidated or distributed to sugar workers. For the biofuel workers, she said only a small amount remains to be liquidated and the DOLE will submit the details to the Committee.

Replying to the query of Rep. Elago on the alleged implementation of a "no vaccine, no work" policy by some employers, Bello reiterated that this is unlawful and not prudent as the country still does not have sufficient supply of vaccines to cover the entire population. He said companies implementing this kind of policy should be reported to the DOLE so that the latter can conduct the necessary investigation.

Rep. Brosas inquired on the number of employment compensation (EC) claims that have already been filed in relation to COVID-19.

The Labor Secretary stated that Filipino workers who were infected with COVID-19 will receive appropriate compensation from the government, through the Employees' Compensation Commission (ECC), with the approval by the ECC Board last April of the inclusion of COVID-19 in its list of occupational and work-related diseases.

DOLE Undersecretary Benjo Santos Benavidez added that about 8,000 claims have been filed thus far. He also said that an information drive on the matter is ongoing so that more COVID-19 infected workers can claim their EC benefits.

On the query of Rep. Go regarding the decrease in the NWPC budget for 2022, NWPC Executive Director Maria Criselda Sy explained that the decrease is due to the non-holding of the Productivity Olympics for next year. She said the Productivity Olympics, which is held every two years, will be conducted this year.

Launched in 2008, the Productivity Olympics is a national competition of the productivity programs and practices of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the agribusiness, service, and industry sectors. (Source: NWPC website)

Several Members expressed support for an increase in the FY 2022 budget of the DOLE and its attached agencies, as they commended Secretary Bello for his outstanding leadership of

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- Office of the Ombudsman

DOLE which led to the effective delivery of quality services to the Filipino workers amidst the pandemic. They also thanked the heads of the DOLE's attached agencies as well as the DOLE regional directors for their assistance and prompt response to the needs of constituents from various legislative districts.

The Committee then decided to terminate the budget briefing of the DOLE and its attached agencies.

The Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Romeo Jalosjos Jr. (1st District, Zamboanga del Norte), sat as the presiding officer during the OMB's budget briefing.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires presented the FY 2022 proposed budget of the OMB of P3.97 billion, as approved by the DBM, which is P710.89 million lower than the current year's appropriation of P4.68 billion. He mentioned that the original budget proposal of the OMB is P4.80 billion. By expense class, he said the FY 2022 proposed budget of the OMB will be distributed as follows: PS, P2.66 billion; MOOE, P1.24 billion; and retirement and life insurance premiums (RLIP), P66.95 million. Martires said the DBM did not provide any allocation for OMB's CO for 2022, but the OMB's original budget proposal for CO is P231.51 million.

According to the Ombudsman, the Constitution and its enabling law, Republic Act 6770 (The Ombudsman Act of 1989), provide for the fiscal autonomy of the OMB and that its appropriations may not be reduced below the amount appropriated for the previous year. However, he said the OMB is willing to sacrifice a portion of its budget for 2022 if the funds will be used by the government to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. He proposed that the OMB's savings be utilized to hire additional personnel to address the lack of manpower in the OMB.

Several Members expressed their support for the restoration of the OMB's 2022 budget to its current year's budget of P4.68 billion to comply with the Constitution and RA 6770. They are Deputy Speaker Rodriguez, Reps. Castro, Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay), Allen Jesse Mangaoang (Kalinga), Jose "Ping-ping" Tejada (3rd District, North Cotabato), and Tyrone Agabas (6th District, Pangasinan).

Relaying the position of Minority Leader Joseph Stephen "Caraps" Paduano (Party-List, ABANG LINGKOD), Rep. Jose Christopher Belmonte (6th District, Quezon City) manifested that the Minority Leader also supports the proposal to raise the OMB's 2022 budget to at least its current budget level.

Rep. Virgilio Lacson (Party-List, MANILA TEACHERS) queried about the reported delays in the release of OMB clearance which takes about 3 to 6 months.

The Ombudsman explained that the delay was caused by the lack of manpower and the imposition of lockdowns because of the pandemic. However, he assured the body that the OMB is already undertaking measures to further streamline its OMB clearance process and that the OMB is starting to fill up its vacant positions to increase its personnel.

The OMB clearance is a certification that the client has no administrative, criminal, and forfeiture cases pending with the OMB or no OMB cases filed with courts which are pending at the time of its issuance. The clearance is used for the

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following purposes: death claim, resignation, retirement, foreign assignment, extension of service, commissionship, guarantorship, reappointment, discharge, dropped from the roll, end of term, nomination, transfer, court and bidding requirements, and firearms license, among others. (Source: OMB website)

Meanwhile, Rep. Zarate noted that Martires has not yet submitted any legislative proposal to amend RA 6713 or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, which the Ombudsman pledged to submit last year.

Martires answered that he plans to reconcile the provisions of RA 6713 and RA 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act), particularly with regard to the release to the public of the Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN) of government officials and employees.

Under RA 6713, the public has the right to know the contents of the SALN, but there was no mention of this in RA 3019.

According to Martires, he proposes to allow the release or publication of the SALN subject to safety nets and stringent penalties for any violation, such as making public comments on any SALN. He added that until such time that these laws are amended, his order to protect the SALN of government officials from media scrutiny will stay.

Last year, the OMB issued Memorandum Circular No. 1, series of 2020, which limits public access to the SALN and allowing its release only for official investigations, by court order, or upon authority from the declarants themselves.

As regards the issue on the SALN of the President, Martires said the OMB has not been authorized by the Office of the President to release a copy of the President's SALN to the public. However, he assured the body that the President has filed with the OMB all his SALNs up to 2020.

Replying to the query of Rep. Go on how to further strengthen the corruption prevention program of the OMB, Martires recommended the establishment of an Ombudsman desk in every city, municipality, and province.

On the query of Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano (1st District, Ilocos Sur) regarding OMB's complaint and case monitoring system, Martires replied that the OMB already plans to digitize this system for easy access and integration of case files, and for a more efficient way of monitoring cases and complaints.

Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked the Ombudsman if the OMB will investigate government agencies flagged by the Commission on Audit for deficiencies and irregularities in their transactions, such as the Department of Health. Martires answered that the OMB will do this.

Regarding the unused capital outlay fund of the OMB for FY 2021 raised by Rep. Garin, Martires said the items to be procured are still undergoing public bidding.

The OMB was asked to submit the pertinent documents that were requested by the Members during the budget hearing.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Economic Affairs	HRs 2154 & 2164	Rep. Garin (S.) and Deputy Speaker Rodriguez	Inquiry into the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines by local government units and the private sector through the multi-party agreements, with the end in view of ramping up vaccination in the rural areas and in the private sector, and achieving herd immunity against COVID-19 for the country	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Sharon Garin (Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA), will continue its inquiry relative to House Resolutions 2154 and 2164 in its next meeting.</p> <p>In her opening statement, Rep. Garin, who is also the author of HR 2154, said that almost two years after the country has been in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, with people adversely affected at varying degrees, it became undisputed that the vaccine is the only long-term solution to combat the disease.</p> <p>She mentioned that Republic Act 11525, or the COVID-19 Vaccination Program Act, was enacted into law on February 26, 2021 to provide a framework for an orderly and effective procurement and administration of COVID-19 vaccines to hasten mass vaccination. The law authorizes LGUs and private entities to assist the government in providing vaccines through multi-party agreements (MPAs) with the Department of Health (DOH) and the National Task Force Against COVID-19 (NTF).</p> <p>Rep. Garin said that her bill thus calls for an inquiry into the status of implementation of RA 11525 to ensure that the vaccination program of the government is not diluted or negated by poor implementation and management. She added that there were reports indicating that a number of local government units (LGUs) and about 300 private sector companies have signed MPAs that would have easily made available about 10 million vaccine doses for their constituents but were unacted upon by the NTF.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), author of HR 2164, stressed that Sections 4 and 5 of RA 11525 provide for mechanisms wherein LGUs and private sector entities are allowed to procure vaccines in cooperation with the DOH and NTF through the MPAs. He thus urged NTF Vaccine Czar Secretary Carlito Galvez to explain in today's inquiry why this mandate of the law was not fulfilled.</p> <p>Galvez stated that the government's COVID-19 vaccination program remains on track despite the challenges and constraints. He reported that the government already secured a total of 187.6 million vaccine doses, of which 52.79 million (28%) have already been delivered while 134.81 million (72%) are targeted to be delivered within six months. To date, he added, a total of 37.18 million doses have been administered, with about 15.84 million people fully vaccinated.</p>

<p>Continuation... Economic Affairs</p>				<p>The vaccine czar also informed the Committee that more than 61 million vaccine doses are expected to arrive in September and October of this year with deliveries of Sinovac, Pfizer, and US-COVAX donations. This aggregate total will allow the country in attaining the 70% herd immunity target, inoculating about 77.14 million individuals, he said.</p> <p>Galvez added that the NTF intends to increase the target population threshold to 80-90% immediately after the 70% target is attained and proceed with the vaccination of adolescents as well as the booster program next year, including expansion of vaccination sites through mobilization of the private sector, recruitment of vaccinators, and preparation of cold storage facilities.</p> <p>Galvez apprised the body of the changes that will have to be made with respect to the introduction of reformulated booster vaccines, recalibrating the country's strategy for provincial deliveries with high cases of COVID-19, and increased prevention strategy against the Delta variant. He proceeded to present NTF's projected vaccine allocations per region covering the last quarter of FY 2021 with focus on supplying more doses to Regions III, IV-A, and those areas with high prevalence of COVID infection.</p> <p>With regard to global figures, Galvez noted that the Philippines ranks 21st in total COVID-19 doses administered out of 204 countries. "In Asia, we are ranked 11th out of 47 countries and 3rd out of 10 among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states, which only means that we are not slow in our vaccination program," Galvez said.</p> <p>On the alleged inaction on the MPAs, Galvez explained that manufacturers are not inclined for the time being to engage in such agreements for reasons that they complicate facilitation and coordination; that manufacturers intend to give priority to orders coming from the national government given the supply constraints; and that they are not open to MPAs unless bilateral agreements are secured first with them.</p> <p>Galvez also clarified that the vaccine brand Covaxin, being manufactured by Bharat Biotech, is not eligible for private sector and LGU procurement since no recommendation has been issued yet by the Health Technology Assessment Council (HTAC), and pending compliance with requirements and completion of negotiations by the NTF.</p> <p>Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines President Dakila Carlo Cua, Ilocos Sur Governor Ryan Luis Singson, and Calapan City Mayor Arnan Panaligan expressed their sentiments at the limited coverage of</p>
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Continuation... Economic Affairs				<p>vaccination in their respective areas, allowing only people belonging to A1 to A3 classification to be vaccinated in spite of the surge in COVID-19 cases outside of Metro Manila. They also complained of shortage of supply and inequitable distribution of vaccines. They urged the NTF to exert more efforts in ensuring equitable and expedient distribution of vaccines nationwide.</p> <p>Kilusang Kontra COVID (KilKoVid) Chair Dr. Anthony Leachon expressed his views on the worsening COVID-19 infection in the country which is attributed mainly to the Delta variant since June of this year. He cited India's experience in flattening the curve of infection even when the Delta variant originated from there. He said India has successfully managed the infection from its peak of about 400,000 per day in May down to less than 50,000 per day in only a period of four months.</p> <p>With DOH data showing three out of four COVID-19 infections are caused by the Delta variant, Leachon warned that this may eventually lead to an overwhelmed healthcare system and ultimately, high mortality rate. He stressed that testing and contact tracing are as important as the ongoing vaccination program of the national government.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Rodriguez maintained the view that the NTF's inaction on the MPAs with both the LGUs and the private sector is unjustified considering the fact that such mechanism is backed by law. On her part, Rep. Garin stressed the need to ease the strict implementation of administrative regulations considering the peculiarity of the pandemic. "What is important now is to get as many vaccines as we can," she said.</p> <p>Other Committee Members echoed the statements made by Reps. Rodriguez and Garin as they raised concerns on the COVID-19 infection and limited vaccine supplies in their respective localities.</p>
Overseas Workers Affairs	HR 1897	Rep. Gonzalez	Commending the Filipino seafarers on-board MV Fleur N for exhibiting an act of heroism in rescuing 86 refugees drifting for days in the Mediterranean Sea	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), adopted House Resolution 1897.</p> <p>Rep. Sandro Gonzalez (Party-List, MARINO), author of HR 1897, lauded the heroic deed of the Filipino seafarers on-board MV Fleur N for rescuing 86 Egyptian refugees drifting for days in the Mediterranean Sea.</p> <p>Expressing support for the resolution, Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) Deputy Executive Director Jeffrey Solon informed the body that MARINA awarded the Filipino seafarers with a plaque of appreciation in recognition of their heroic act.</p> <p>Replying to the query of Rep. Macnell Lusotan (Party-List, MARINO) if MARINA can grant</p>

Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs				<p>financial reward to these Filipino seafarers, Solon said that what his agency can do is to exempt them from paying their seaman's book upon renewal.</p> <p>Reps. Gonzalez and Lusotan stated that they will make representations during the FY 2022 budget hearing of the MARINA to earmark funds as reward money to the Filipino seafarers of MV Fleur N and to future seafarers who will perform similar heroic act.</p>
	HR 2009	Rep. Mendoza	Inquiry into the annual deployment cap on healthcare workers	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on the issues raised in HR 2009 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Lusotan presided over the meeting to give way to Rep. Mendoza to sponsor his bill.</p> <p>In his sponsorship remarks, Rep. Mendoza said that his resolution calls for the lifting of the annual deployment cap of new hire nurses and healthcare workers (HCWs) abroad which is presently pegged at 6,500. He said that setting a limit on the deployment of nurses and HCWs who want to work abroad denies them of their right to seek better employment opportunities and earn a gainful living to support their family especially during this time of pandemic.</p> <p>Department of Health (DOH) Learning and Development Division Chief Pretchell <i>Tolentino</i> explained that the government had to set a cap on the deployment of healthcare professionals abroad in view of the shortage of healthcare workers in the country, especially in this time of pandemic when their services are very much needed.</p> <p>Based on records of the DOH, Tolentino said there are around 601,796 Filipino nurses as of April 30, 2021, more than half of whom work abroad (349,335 or 58%). Those who are in the country are either working as nurses (183,491 or 30%) or employed in other fields (68,970 or 12%). With the standard ratio of 27.4 nurses for every 10,000 population, Tolentino emphasized that the country is in need of around 303,080 nurses nationwide. She claimed that with 183,491 nurses employed in the country, the government needs an additional 120,000 nurses to achieve the ideal ratio.</p> <p>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Legal Assistance Division Officer-in-charge Celso Hernandez explained that in December 2020, the POEA Governing Board issued Resolution No. 17 lifting the moratorium on the deployment of nurses, nursing aides, and nursing assistants abroad. The resolution also provides that effective January 1, 2021, the POEA shall impose an annual deployment ceiling of 5,000 new-hire HCWs disaggregated by occupation until such time that the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of</p>

Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs				<p>Emerging Infectious Diseases may decide to increase such ceiling.</p> <p>Thus, Hernandez said that in June 2021, the IATF increased the annual deployment cap to 6,500 upon the recommendation of the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Technical Working Group (TWG) on Mission Critical Skills. This decision was contained in IATF Resolution No. 122, series of 2021, which also stated that HCWs hired under government-to-government labor agreements are exempted from the deployment ceiling.</p> <p>Philippine Nurses Association (PNA) National President Melbert Reyes supports the conduct of an inquiry into the annual deployment cap on HCWs. He manifested that government should not deprive Filipino nurses of a chance to have a better life by preventing them from seeking employment abroad. Instead, he said government should be able to come up with competitive salaries for Filipino nurses so that they will be encouraged to stay and work in the country.</p> <p>The IATF, Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the agencies that compose the DOLE-TWG on Mission Critical Skills will be invited in the Committee's next meeting.</p>
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TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Public Information (Technical Working Group)	HBs 12, 226, 644, 712, 837, 1625, 3063, 4570 & 4673	Reps. Del Mar (dec.), Castro (F.L.), Tambunting, Belmonte, Bordado, Fortun, Nograles (J.J.), Deputy Speaker Rodriguez and Rep. Nieto	Strengthening the people's rights to information	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Ron Salo (Party-List, KABAYAN), will deliberate further on the 19 bills in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Salo pointed out the need to pass the proposed law to improve transparency in government which includes within its ambit even private individuals dealing or transacting with government agencies using public funds. He said that currently, there are about 59 countries around the world with a comprehensive Freedom of Information (FOI) law. Just like these countries, Rep. Salo hopes that the Philippines can also pass a comprehensive FOI law that will balance and reconcile the interests of the government, by providing reasonable exceptions, with the Constitutionally guaranteed right of the people to information on matters of public concern.</p> <p>In today's meeting, the TWG discussed Sections 13 to 23 of House Bill 5776, which the TWG previously agreed to use as its working draft. Resource persons from various government agencies and private</p>
	HBs 51, 1302, 1487 & 1975	Reps. Cabochan, Villafuerte, Tan (A.), and Deputy Speaker Villanueva	Implementing the people's right to information and the constitutional policies of full public disclosure and honesty in the public service	
	HBs 813, 1608, 7219 & 7229	Reps. Biazon, Castelo, Tutor, and Deputy Speaker Escudero	Implementing the right of the people to information on matters of public concern guaranteed under Section 7, Article III of the 1987 Constitution and the state policy of full public disclosure of all its transactions involving public interest under Section 28, Article II of the 1987	

Continuation... Public Information (Technical Working Group)			Constitution	organizations gave their respective comments and recommendations on the proposed law.
	HB 5566	Rep. Zarate	Ensuring public access to official records, documents and any other information of public concern	Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Undersecretary and FOI Program Director Kristian Ablan suggested that Section 13, which pertains to the period of compliance for the processing of FOI requests, be aligned with the provisions of Republic Act 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, as amended.
	HB 5776	Rep. Vargas	Enabling the people's constitutional right of access to information	<p>RA 9485 provides that all government agencies, through their Information Officer, shall respond to requests as soon as practicable, and in any case within three working days for simple requests, seven working days for complex requests, and 20 working days for highly technical requests, from receipt thereof. As defined in the law, simple requests may involve information or records that are readily available at the website of the agency or in its records management database that can be easily retrieved. Information or records may fall under complex requests if the same are not available in the website and which will require an extensive search. Highly technical requests may involve examination of voluminous records that are not available in the records management.</p> <p>Rep. Salo inquired if an extension for the period of compliance would still be needed if the TWG adopts the proposal of PCOO.</p> <p>Ablan informed the Committee that there are instances when the request is initially classified as simple request but would eventually turn out to be complex or highly technical. Hence, he suggested that extension of period of compliance should be granted but in no way should the request be responded to beyond 20 days. The PCOO will submit a rewording of Section 13.</p> <p>Right to Know Right Now (R2KRN) Coalition Co-Convenor Eirene Jhone Aguila suggested the inclusion in the bill of a provision stating that when the request for information concerns the life and personal liberty of a citizen, the response to it shall be made within 48 hours from receipt of the request. Ablan suggested that instead of 48 hours, the compliance should be within two days. Aguila agreed with Ablan's suggestion.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Civil Service Commission (CSC) lawyer Christian Dawn Molina inquired how the proposed law would classify the request for a copy of the Statement of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALN).</p> <p>Ablan said that repository agencies such as the CSC, Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the President, Court Administrator, Supreme</p>

<p>Continuation... Public Information (Technical Working Group)</p>				<p>Court, Senate of the Philippines, and House of Representatives have their respective guidelines on the disclosure of the SALN.</p> <p>Aguila proposed that the guidelines for the disclosure of SALN's be standardized and that they be treated as simple request which should be released within three working days.</p> <p>Molina opined that three days might be too short considering there are offices with centralized SALN repositories making the issue on logistics worth noting. He suggested that the compliance period be instead extended to seven working days, which the TWG adopted.</p> <p>ICT policy researcher Mary Grace Mirandilla-Santos and IT consultant Lito Averia of Secure Connections proposed amendments to Section 17 of HB 5776 which pertains to the creation of an online portal to be used as a facility for lodging requests using the internet. (Secure Connections is a coalition of cybersecurity stakeholders that aims to bring together knowledge and expertise from the public, private, and civil society sectors for the improvement of Philippine cybersecurity.)</p> <p>Rep. Salo and Ablan were of the opinion that Section 17 can be deleted since a similar online portal already exists. The TWG remained undecided on the matter pending the inputs from the Department of Information and Communications Technology.</p> <p>The TWG also agreed to include in the bill provisions on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the functions of an FOI officer; • Establishment of an internal review mechanism in government agencies that shall evaluate and assess a request for review of the denial of the request for information; • Issuance of a notice of denial informing the person making the request that his or her request was denied by an agency; • Establishment of an appeals mechanism in the proposed FOI Commission where the denial of the request for information may be appealed; as well as an appeals mechanism in the Court of Appeals where the decision of the FOI Commission may be appealed; and • Issuance of a writ of execution by the FOI Commission to enforce its decision and payment of administrative fines provided under the proposed law. <p>On Section 23 (Exceptions), Rep. Salo manifested that there should be guidelines on what should be included in the list of exceptions. He said that as presently worded,</p>
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Continuation... Public Information (Technical Working Group)				<p>the agencies are given absolute discretion in determining what documents or information should be exempted from the proposed law.</p> <p>Ablan agreed to include a basic listing of documents and information that should be excluded from public access. He suggested that the list of exceptions as proposed in HB 4570, authored by Deputy Speaker Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), be adopted. The TWG agreed with his suggestion.</p>
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AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples	Briefing by concerned agencies on the reported killings of non-Moro indigenous peoples (IPs) and alleged violation of their rights in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)	<p>The Committee, chaired by Kalinga Rep. Allen Jesse Mangaoang, listened to the briefing on the alleged killings of non-Moro IPs and the alleged violation of their rights in the BARMM.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Mangaoang said that an executive meeting was previously held by the Committee to validate the reported aggressions against the non-Moro IPs and to identify the culprits so that they will be made liable for their actions. Further, he informed the body that Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan (Party-List, AMIN) filed House Resolution 1926 which directs the Committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on matters relating to the indigenous cultural communities and indigenous peoples (ICCs/IPs). However, he said HR 1926 was primarily referred to the Committee on Muslim Affairs by the Committee on Rules. Nonetheless, he said that a request for a change of referral has already been filed by his Committee.</p> <p>Rep. Sangcopan emphasized that the BOL recognizes the rights and privileges of ICCs/IPs including non-Moro IPs. Despite this recognition, she said the non-Moro IPs continue to experience harassments and forced displacements from their ancestral lands from armed groups and various atrocities are being committed against them such as the killing or execution of their leaders and other farmers. Thus, she filed HR 1926 to determine how best to achieve the purpose of the BOL in relation to the challenges being faced by non-Moro IPs in the BARMM, and how to better strengthen the existing mechanisms under this law.</p> <p>Qurino Rep. Junie Cua expressed his support for the conduct of an inquiry on the alleged atrocities being committed against the non-Moro IPs despite the implementation of the BOL, which clearly provides for the protection of their rights and privileges. He underscored the need to come up with solutions to put an end to the violence and abuse being experienced by non-Moro IPs in the BARMM.</p> <p>The Committee first listened to the testimony of Timuay Leticio Datuwata, supreme tribal chief of the Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG), representing the Teduray and Lambangian tribes in Mindanao. He informed the body that land grabbing and massive expansion of communities belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are ongoing and that harassment of his tribe by armed groups within their ancestral domain continue. He said he sent a series of letters to the</p>

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Indigenous Cultural
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BARMM Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MIPA) to report the incidents, but he never received a response.

National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Chair Allen Capuyan also reported cases of rights violations against the ICCs/IPs – Teduray, Lambangian, and Manobo Dulangan tribes – in the BARMM. He confirmed the occurrence of indiscriminate shootings, murder, ambush, burning of houses, and harassment of non-Moro IPs that are being perpetrated by armed men. He said the NCIP already reported these cases during a cabinet meeting at the Office of the President and recommended that the military and police should ensure that peace and order is maintained within the ancestral domains of the three tribes. He also informed the body that a technical working group (TWG) was formed with the MIPA in order to address these concerns and to pursue the delineation of ancestral domains in the BARMM.

For his part, Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) Parliament Member Romeo Saliga (Maguindanao and IP) emphasized that in terms of policies, the BTA Parliament has not been remiss in promoting and upholding the rights of ICCs/IPs. He said several resolutions have been filed seeking to protect the rights and welfare of ICCs/IPs, including bolstering IP education, prohibiting the sale of lands within the ancestral domain, and requiring the conduct of thorough investigations on violations of non-Moro IP's rights. He added that Bill No. 40 or the proposed IP Code was also filed and is pending with the Committee on Indigenous People's Affairs. He remarked that the problem is not about the policies but in the implementation of these policies.

MIPA Minister Melanio Ulama said that because the Bangsamoro government is still in transition, there are certain functions that still require the expertise of the NCIP, particularly on the delineation of ancestral domain. He reiterated MIPA's willingness to work with the NCIP on this matter so that the rights of ICCs/IPs within their ancestral domain will be upheld. He also apprised the body that IP rights violation cases against non-Moro IPs are being resolved by the MIPA, but serious cases such as murders and killings are being forwarded to the Philippine National Police (PNP) for appropriate action.

Asked by Rep. Sangcopan if the MIPA received the letters of Datuwata, Ulama replied that the MIPA has not received any such letter.

Meanwhile, BTA Parliament Deputy Speaker Omar Yasser Sema (Maguindanao) explained that in the 1970s, there were Moros who were displaced from the lands that form part of the area now classified as ancestral domain of the three tribes. He posited that this could be the reason why some Moros are trying to take these lands by force. He also stated that security is still weak in the BARMM and that policing or law enforcement is still very much a function of the national government.

On the part of the PNP, Regional Director Eden Ugale of the Police Regional Office - Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (PRO-BAR) confirmed the presence of threat groups, such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which are responsible for some of the atrocities in the area, like burning the houses of non-Moro IPs. He assured the body that the PRO-BAR will intensify its operations against loose firearms, private armed groups, and all forms of lawlessness; work towards a peaceful settlement of land disputes between parties in coordination with the local government unit (LGU); and

<p><i>Continuation...</i> Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples</p>		<p>coordinate with counterparts in the military for a possible deployment of security forces in areas of conflict.</p> <p>Rep. Sangcapan inquired about the date of creation of the TWG between the NCIP and MIPA and the steps undertaken by the TWG to respond to the IP rights violations.</p> <p>Capuyan replied that the TWG was created on August 5, 2020. On the actions taken by the TWG, Ulama said the MIPA has service centers on the ground which report the incidents to the concerned barangays or the PNP-PRO-BAR. He added that the MIPA is also actively coordinating with the LGUs to provide assistance to the victims.</p> <p>Asked to describe the provisions of Bill No. 40, NCIP Commissioner Jong Navarro said it mirrors the provisions of Republic Act 8371 or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997.</p> <p>Commission on Human Rights' (CHR) Legal, Legislative, and Linkages Division Chief Erwin Caliba manifested that the IP rights violations against the non-Moro IPs are a serious concern and that the CHR will be creating a TWG to specifically look into the matter.</p> <p>Rep. Mangaoang thanked the resource persons for their active participation in the discussion and urged them to promptly fulfill the commitments they have made in today's meeting to respond to the concerns of the non-Moro IPs.</p>
<p>Suffrage and Electoral Reforms</p>	<p>Report by the Commission on Elections on its preparations for the May 9, 2022 national and local elections, specifically on its draft New Normal Manual</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Juliet Marie de Leon Ferrer (4th District, Negros Occidental), listened to the briefing of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) on its preparations for the May 2022 national and local elections.</p> <p>At the start of the meeting, Rep. Ferrer said that the Committee would like to be apprised of COMELEC's preparations for the upcoming elections, particularly its draft New Normal Manual. This, she said, will help the Committee see a clear picture of what would take place on election day and how safe the voters would be as they exercise their right to vote amid the pandemic.</p> <p>COMELEC Planning Department Director Esmeralda Amora-Ladra presented the salient features of the draft New Normal Manual, which serves as guidelines in the management of all the processes and activities of COMELEC taking into consideration the new normal work situations. Amora-Ladra further said that the manual shall cover the functional and electoral activities conducted by and with the COMELEC. She explained that functional activities pertain to the performance of the administrative and operational work processes in the COMELEC offices including its frontline services. On the other hand, electoral activities are those being undertaken within the complete election cycle – pre-election day, election day, and post election day.</p> <p>Amora-Ladra also discussed the following guidelines in the conduct of next year's polls based on the COMELEC's New Normal Manual:</p> <p>For the filing of certificate of candidacy (COC), the aspirant candidate or his/her authorized representative shall personally submit to the COMELEC the notarized COC. The one who will file the COC shall be subject to health protocols such as submitting a negative rapid antigen result and health declaration form (HDF), and temperature screening before entering the venue.</p>

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Suffrage and Electoral
Reforms

Free airtime slots on the official social media channels of the COMELEC shall be provided to all national candidates every night beginning February 6, 2022. The slots shall be assigned based on the results of a televised raffle of slots, which shall take place on January 8, 2022.

In the staging of an e-rally or livestream of political rallies or campaigns, no more than two candidates shall be physically present in the same location at the same time. Candidates shall not be allowed to give gifts to livestream audiences to run promotions and campaigns.

In-person rallies and other political activities may be undertaken subject to compliance with the requirements of local government units (LGUs) based on local ordinances. Such activities must also observe the following guidelines: three candidates at a given time; capacity of the venue shall be at 10% maximum; only 18-64 years old people will be allowed to enter the venue; seating distance should be one meter apart; and statement of compliance with health protocols shall be submitted to COMELEC.

Door-to-Door campaigning will be allowed provided that the following are observed:

- There shall be a maximum of five persons in a walkabout group for each candidate;
- Maximum of five candidates conducting walkabout depending on the size of the barangay;
- No contact between the walkabout groups and the candidates;
- Interactions shall be brief, transient, and with minimal physical contact;
- Within 24 hours of the conclusion of the walkabout, the candidate must submit a statement of compliance with health protocols; the organizers shall also submit an affidavit affirming the compliance with health protocols.

During the casting and counting of votes, all voters who enter the voting centers should follow standard health protocols by wearing face mask and face shield at all times and submitting a pre-accomplished HDF.

Rep. Lorenz Defensor (3rd District, Iloilo) manifested that the 10% maximum allowable capacity of the venue for in-person rallies should be reviewed. He is of the opinion that this should be decreased further, particularly for huge venues, to avoid a large crowd going to the place.

On the query of Rep. Edgar Erice (2nd District, Caloocan City), COMELEC Commissioner Antonio Kho Jr. said the New Normal Manual was already approved by the COMELEC en banc. However, he said it is still a work in progress because COMELEC is anticipating changes along the way depending on the pandemic situation and will still accept suggestions from Congress.

Rep. Erice then suggested that the COMELEC furnish copies of the draft New Normal Manual to all candidates so they can submit their comments. Kho said he will inform the Commission on this suggestion.

Reps. Defensor and Erice suggested that the COMELEC should issue common guidelines in the conduct of face-to-face rallies and must not rely on local ordinances which may have

Continuation... Suffrage and Electoral Reforms	<p>varying regulations per LGU. This setup might also be used against the opponents of incumbent local officials, they added.</p> <p>Likewise, the two lawmakers questioned the required submission of HDF by voters during election day as this may eat up time and result in longer queues at the voting precincts.</p> <p>Amora-Ladra said she will inform her principals and see if COMELEC can dispense with the submission of the HDF.</p> <p>Replying to the query of Rep. Erice, COMELEC Deputy Executive Director Teopisto Elnas Jr. said that the voting simulation will be held on September 19, 2021 in Pasay City to determine how long would it take for a voter to vote. The COMELEC will send an invitation to the Committee Members to this event.</p>
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DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Overseas Workers Affairs	<p>Discussion/updates on issues and concerns affecting overseas Filipino workers (OFWs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current situation of OFWs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic • Delay in the issuance of passports of OFWs 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), continued its discussion with concerned government agencies on various issues affecting the OFWs especially during this time of pandemic.</p> <p>Department of Labor and Employment - International Labor Affairs Bureau (DOLE-ILAB) OIC-Director Lamberto Pastrana reported that a total of 807,370 OFWs had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of this number, 679,845 have been repatriated, 49,239 are waiting to be repatriated, while 78,289 opted to stay on-site.</p> <p>Under its Abot Kamayang Pagtulong sa OFWs Program (AKAP), the DOLE extended financial assistance amounting to P5.25 billion to a total of 518,647 OFWs, according to Pastrana.</p> <p>Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Consul General Jose Cabrera III reported that as of September 6, 2021, a total of 413,112 overseas Filipinos have been repatriated since the start of the pandemic. He added that DFA has arranged and mounted 103 chartered flights to bring home 85,956 distressed Filipinos from the Asia Pacific, Middle East, Europe and Africa.</p> <p>The DFA has also assisted in the shipment of bodily or cremated remains of Filipinos who died overseas during the pandemic, and coordinated with other government agencies for the provision of quarantine facilities, local transportation, and medical assistance needed by overseas Filipinos upon their arrival in the Philippines, Cabrera said.</p> <p>Rep. Macnell Lusotan (Party-List, MARINO) inquired on the reason for the delay in pre-booking for the quarantine of arriving sea-based OFWs. Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Director Edelyn Dungan Claustro explained that the delay is attributed to the daily cap of 2,500 bookings set by the IATF because of the shortage of hotel rooms used for quarantine.</p> <p>On the delay in the issuance of passports of OFWs, DFA Passport Division Director Marie Cris Chieng attributed this to the Department's lack of manpower due to the imposition of lockdowns and DFA personnel getting sick with COVID-19. Nevertheless, Chieng reported that starting September 6, 2021,</p>

<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarantine, testing, vaccination, and certification of vaccination of OFWs • On the case of rescued domestic workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 	<p>the OFW portal of the DFA now offers 820 slots daily from the previous 268 in its effort to add more appointment slots for passport issuance and renewal. Additional temporary offsite passport services (TOPS) were also opened in Olongapo City and Newport City in Pasay City and all TOPS will extend their operation until the end of December of this year, she said.</p> <p>Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) Vice President Luis Corral proposed the outsourcing of manpower to augment the personnel of the DFA Passport Division.</p> <p>Blas Ople Policy Center President Susan Ople said that there should be a continuing dialogue between the DFA and stakeholders to come up with policies that can address the challenges in passport application or renewal.</p> <p>On the proposal of Rep. Mendoza to extend the validity of passport to two years or until the pandemic is over, Chieng promised to bring up the matter to the DFA Secretary, along with the suggestions of the other resource persons.</p> <p>DOH Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje gave the assurance that the DOH will coordinate with local government units (LGUs) to give priority to OFWs in their vaccination programs in view of complaints that OFWs continue to encounter difficulties getting vaccinated at the LGUs. She said that the government has already placed outbound OFWs in the A1 or top priority group in its COVID-19 vaccination drive. She also said that as soon as supplies are available, the DOH will allot more of the preferred Pfizer or Moderna vaccines to OFWs.</p> <p>On the certification of vaccination of OFWs, Cabotaje said that a digitized certification would soon be issued by the government.</p> <p>Migrante representative Joanna Concepcion disclosed that the Bureau of Quarantine of the DOH is charging P370 for the issuance of the “yellow card” as a vaccination certificate. She complained that OFWs should not be burdened by this additional expense, especially during this pandemic.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza agreed that the amount is exorbitant, since the yellow card is just a piece of paper certifying that the OFW is already vaccinated.</p> <p>The Committee will continue its discussion of the case of rescued domestic workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in its next meeting. It agreed to invite the recruitment agencies involved and the officials of the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) in Riyadh.</p> <p>This, after Ople presented the case of five OFWs who suffered from physical abuse from their employer in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She called for the blacklisting of the employer and the suspension of the placement agencies that recruited these workers, claiming that the employer was still able to hire replacement workers from the Philippines.</p>
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