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# Committee Daily Bulletin

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## COMMITTEE MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
<b>Overseas Workers Affairs</b>	Substitute Bill to HBs 234, 277, 4156 & 5043	Reps. Vargas, Aglipay, Haresco, and Brosas	Providing for a Special Assistance Fund for distressed overseas Filipino workers (OFWs)	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), approved the Substitute Bill to HBs 234, 277, 4156, and 5043. The substitute bill will be referred to the Committee on Appropriations for review of its funding provisions.</p> <p>Committee Members present agreed to increase the Special Assistance Fund for OFWs in distress from P1 billion (as proposed in the bills) to P5 billion.</p> <p>Rep. Mendoza said that during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic where thousands of OFWs are affected, it is necessary to establish a special fund from where financial assistance for distressed OFWs can be drawn, to be jointly administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration.</p> <p>Rep. Teodorico Haresco Jr. (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Aklan), author of HB 4156, maintained that with the huge contribution of the OFWs to the country's economy, it is but fair that the government takes care of them especially when they are in dire need and ensures that their rights are protected at all times.</p> <p>Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA), author of HB 5043, expects that the proposed law will be a big help to the OFWs knowing that the existing financial assistance being extended to them is not enough to help them ride out the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>

## DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<b>Overseas Workers Affairs</b>	Discussion on the situation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; repatriation of OFWs due to the pandemic; government programs to assist the affected OFWs; and quarantine protocols for returning OFWs	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), discussed with concerned government agencies and private entities the problems affecting OFWs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>In today's meeting, Rep. Mendoza asked the resource persons to report on the condition of OFWs affected by COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown as well as the types of assistance being extended to this sector to give the Committee a clear picture of the situation of OFWs on the ground.</p> <p>Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Undersecretary Sarah Arriola reported that as of May 21, there have been 2,461 OFWs infected</p>

<p>Continuation...</p> <p>Overseas Workers Affairs</p>	<p>with COVID-19, including 861 recoveries and 285 deaths. Most of the fatalities were OFWs who worked in the Americas while only two deaths were recorded in Asia and the Pacific.</p> <p>The DFA has provided assistance to OFWs through repatriation for those who wanted or needed to come home as well as provided affected OFWs with emergency supplies, medicines, food, and accommodation. According to Arriola, 28,589 OFWs have been repatriated as of May 21.</p> <p>Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Undersecretary Claro Arellano said that to date, more than 300,000 OFWs have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic who were either displaced, distressed or stranded, or infected by the disease.</p> <p>To mitigate the effects of the pandemic on OFWs, the DOLE has launched the <i>Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong</i> (AKAP) program which provides a one-time financial assistance of \$200 for every displaced on-site OFW or P10,000 for every repatriated OFW or one who was not able to return to her or his employer abroad due to the lockdown. According to Arellano, the program has disbursed around P1.3 billion to over 130,000 OFW beneficiaries. Likewise, DOLE is preparing a post-COVID recovery plan to provide employment and livelihood opportunities to returning OFWs.</p> <p>Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Administrator Bernard Olalia apprised the Committee of the considerable decrease in OFW deployment from April of last year – 99% compared to the same period this year. Olalia added that more OFWs are expected to return to the country this month.</p> <p>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Administrator Hans Cacdac told the Committee that as of May 19, OWWA has provided assistance to 35,133 OFWs in terms of providing temporary shelters in hotels or resorts as they comply with the 14-day quarantine period, food, and free transportation to their provinces after being cleared to leave the quarantine facilities. OWWA has disbursed a total amount of P497.39 million for this assistance.</p> <p>Expecting that the mandatory community quarantine protocol will not be lifted any time soon, Cacdac requested Congress for assistance in sourcing additional funds so that the OWWA can provide assistance to more OFWs in these trying times.</p> <p>Several resource persons like Ople Policy Center President Susan Ople and Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) Vice President Luis Corral agreed that OWWA should be given additional funds. Ople added that future contracts of employment of OFWs should have provisions for emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, for their added protection.</p> <p>Rep. Sharon Garin (Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA), who is also the co-chairperson of the Economic Stimulus Package Cluster of the Defeat COVID-19 Ad Hoc Committee, suggested that DOLE and OWWA submit a request for additional budget with proper justification.</p> <p>Likewise, Rep. Enrico Pineda (Party-List, 1-PACMAN) and Rep. Mendoza asked the concerned agencies to formulate a comprehensive plan including the funding requirement that would allow them to effectively respond to the pandemic at the worst-case scenario.</p> <p>The OWWA and Filipino Association for Mariner's Employment (FAME) Inc. President Rodello Ortiz expressed conflicting views on who should be paying for the quarantine-related expenses of seafarers.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Overseas Workers Affairs</p>		<p>Ortiz asserted that licensed manning agencies (LMAs) are under no legal obligation to spend for the quarantine expenses, such as food and accommodation, of seafarers and are only doing so out of their concern for the seafarers. He argued that LMAs' contractual responsibilities with their seafarers end the moment the latter arrive in the Philippines, which is the point-of-hire. It is therefore the OWWA which should shoulder these costs, Ortiz insisted, as he asked OWWA to reimburse the LMAs some P2.8 billion for the quarantine-related expenses they incurred.</p> <p>Cacdac rejected Ortiz's claims emphasizing that the OWWA funds should not be treated as bailout funds for the manning agencies. Cacdac cited POEA Memorandum Circular No. 9, series of 2020 and RA 10022 as the bases for his contention that it is the LMAs which should shoulder the expenses of seafarers while on quarantine. (RA 10022 amended Republic Act No. 8042, otherwise known as the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, as amended, further improving the standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrant workers, their families and overseas Filipinos in distress.)</p> <p>Rep. Ferdinand Gaitanillo (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) and Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) decried the poor treatment of OFWs who are under quarantine in some parts of Metro Manila and nearby areas, and even those who are still abroad and are awaiting repatriation.</p> <p>Three OFWs, who are undergoing the required quarantine, testified that they, along with thousand others, are still "confined" in their temporary shelters for one to two months now, which is already way beyond the government-imposed 14-day quarantine period upon their return to the Philippines. They complained about the snail-paced processing and releasing of results of their COVID-19 swab test, which is also a requirement for returning OFWs. They fear that their health and safety are at risk with their continued stay in quarantine facilities.</p> <p>Cacdac admitted that the OWWA is having difficulties in responding to all the needs of returning OFWs because of their sheer number, coming home in droves within a short span of time. He, however, assured the Committee that OWWA is doing the best it can to handle the situation.</p> <p>The Committee asked the DOLE to submit a Recovery and Social Amelioration Plan for OFWs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other resource persons were also asked to submit their position papers on how best to address the problems of the affected OFWs for discussion in the next meeting of the Committee.</p>
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