



Committee Daily Bulletin

JOINT CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETING

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on Universal Health Care (UHC)	Organizational meeting and adoption of the Committee's Rules of Procedure for the 18 th Congress	<p>The Joint Congressional Oversight Committee (JCOC), co-chaired by Rep. Angelina "Helen" Tan, M.D. (4th District, Quezon), Chair of the House Committee on Health, and Sen. Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go, Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Demography, held its organizational meeting during which the Committee's Rules of Procedure for the 18th Congress was adopted.</p> <p>The Universal Health Care Law or RA 11223 created the JCOC mandating it to conduct a regular review of the implementation of RA 11223 which shall entail a systematic evaluation of the performance, impact or accomplishments of the law and the performance of the various agencies involved in realizing universal health care, particularly with respect to their roles and functions.</p>
	Report of the Department of Health (DOH) and Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) on the implementation of RA 11223 or the UHC Law; and discussion on the new premium contribution schedule under the UHC, particularly the increased premium rates for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs)	<p>Senator Go said that RA 11223, which was passed into law in February 2019, seeks to improve access to healthcare and fix the country's health system. Under the law, every Filipino shall be automatically included in the National Health Insurance Program either as direct or indirect contributors. This is to shield people from the financial risk of paying health services out of their own pockets.</p> <p>Rep. Tan said that the JCOC would like to hear the concerns of PhilHealth members, especially the OFWs, regarding the premium hike prescribed under RA 11223. She made it clear, however, that the increase in premium rates cuts across all sectors falling under the category of "direct contributors" and not only the OFWs. She underscored the importance of the availability of funds for the UHC law to realize its objectives, hence the premium contributions of all direct contributors are vital to achieve the highest attainable standard of health for all Filipinos.</p> <p>RA 11223 defines "direct contributors" as "those who have the capacity to pay premiums, are gainfully employed, and are bound by an employer-employee relationship, or are self-earning, professional practitioners, migrant workers, including their qualified dependents, and lifetime members."</p> <p>Senator Go echoed the pronouncement of President Rodrigo Duterte to suspend the collection of higher premiums from OFWs, explaining that the sector is hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Francisco Duque III said that battling the COVID-19 pandemic has put too much pressure on the country's health system, which drew attention to the necessity of its transformation and improvement. He said that implementing the UHC Law and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic are symbiotic, such that the Department has adopted the principles of the UHC in all its response and mitigation efforts related to COVID-19. Under the UHC program this year, Duque said that the DOH will focus foremost on providing primary healthcare services and integrating the health systems in all provinces and cities.</p> <p>DOH Undersecretary Mario Villaverde reported on the status of implementation of the UHC Law. He said that the DOH, for now,</p>

<p>Continuation...</p> <p>Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on Universal Health Care (UHC)</p>		<p>has conducted various fora nationwide to inform the public of the salient features of the law and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). Villaverde said that under the proposed 2021 budget of the DOH, P53.20 billion or 29% of the department budget will be allocated for the UHC Law.</p> <p>The catch up plan for UHC implementation under a new, better normal includes strengthening the capacity of local government units (LGU) to deliver health services, improving the county's health system to respond better to health emergencies, institutionalizing digital processes and mechanisms, intensifying health promotion and health literacy campaigns, and harmonizing multi-sectoral engagement and participation, Villaverde added.</p> <p>PhilHealth President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ricardo Morales presented the agency's accomplishments, initiatives, and plans relative to the implementation of the UHC.</p> <p>According to Morales, the approved budget for UHC under the 2020 General Appropriations Act was P71.35 billion, which is way below PhilHealth's proposal of P153.1 billion subsidy. He said that this was not enough to fund the premium of all indirect contributors, thus affecting PhilHealth's capacity to cover all medical benefit claims. For 2021, PhilHealth's proposed subsidy is P138.08 billion.</p> <p>As of April 30, 2020, Morales said PhilHealth was only able to collect a total premium income of P46.5 billion, which is below the benefit expense of P52.5 billion. Collections from direct contributors dropped significantly due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Morales said PhilHealth's COVID-19 related response from February 2020 to January 2021 is estimated to cost P40.7 billion. Presenting the National Health Insurance Program's (NHIP) fund projections, Morales pointed out that PhilHealth would run a budget deficit until 2024 under the COVID-19 scenario.</p> <p>On the issue regarding the premium contribution, Morales explained that based on the UHC Law, the premium rate shall be 3% for a monthly income ranging from P10,000 to P60,000. Starting next year, this will increase to 3.5% until the premium rate reaches 5% in 2025 for incomes between P10,000 to P100,000.</p> <p>Morales said that PhilHealth issued Circular 2020-0014 providing the guidelines on the payment of premium contributions by OFWs. For 2020, OFWs shall pay a premium of P2,400 as initial payment and the balance of the annual premium contribution may be paid through a flexible payment scheme within a 12-month period starting from the month of initial payment. He said by January 2021, the minimum acceptable initial payment by OFWs is three-month premium and the balance may also be paid in installments.</p> <p>However, due to the COVID-19 situation, Morales said PhilHealth issued Advisory 2020-037 which conforms to the Executive Department's directive to make payments of premiums by OFWs voluntary for the duration of the pandemic.</p> <p>On Morales' statement that the implementation of the UHC Act is better delayed or postponed first in view of the inadequacy of funds, Rep. Tan and Senator Hontiveros disagreed, reiterating the need to improve primary healthcare benefits amid the pandemic. Rep. Tan added that strengthening primary care will help PhilHealth lessen its expenses in terms of payment of benefit claims due to hospitalization.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Department of Budget and Management-Budget and Management Bureau C Chief Johnry Castillo said that preferential</p>
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<p><i>Continuation...</i> Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on Universal Health Care (UHC)</p>		<p>attention will be given to the funding requirements of PhilHealth, but subject to available fiscal space for 2021.</p> <p>On the query of some of the Members why OFWs are required to pay first their PhilHealth premium contributions prior to the issuance of Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC), Morales admitted that the IRR of the law contained this requirement. Nevertheless, he said that PhilHealth will look into the matter and make the necessary recommendations for possible amendment of the IRR.</p> <p>Representatives of OFWs present in the meeting objected to the increase in PhilHealth premium and suggested that the membership in PhilHealth should not be made mandatory to OFWs. Likewise, representatives from the Philippine Medical Association, Philippine Hospital Association, Philippine College of Surgeons, and the Rizal Parafique Medical Society asked that the increase in premium be suspended until December 2021 or until the economy recovers from the pandemic to lessen the financial burden on PhilHealth members.</p> <p>Senator Richard Gordon recalled that in 2019, the total premium paid by OFWs reached only P1.02 billion while they and their dependents were able to avail themselves of benefits from PhilHealth amounting P1.7 billion. Senator Gordon emphasized the advantages of being members of PhilHealth and paying the required premiums.</p> <p>Rep. Tan said that PhilHealth should accord all its members equal treatment noting that while other sectors which are also affected by COVID-19 are continuously required to pay PhilHealth contributions, the OFWs are allowed to pay the premiums on voluntary basis.</p> <p>Former Senator JV Ejercito, one of the principal sponsors of the UHC Law, expressed support for the amendment of some provisions of the law to make it more responsive in this time of pandemic and during other health emergencies.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to study the law further and determine the necessity of amending it without compromising its objectives.</p>
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DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<p>Metro Manila Development</p>	<p>Assessment of the current public transport situation in Metro Manila</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Manuel Luis Lopez (1st District, Manila), discussed with government agencies and the transport sector the current public transport situation in Metro Manila under the general community quarantine (GCQ).</p> <p>Several Members expressed their concern over the lack of public transportation in Metro Manila and not allowing other means of public transport to ply their routes even as most offices and certain industries and businesses are now allowed to operate. The situation puts in jeopardy the welfare of workers, especially those covered by the “no work, no pay” policy, who could not report for work, as well as the drivers and operators of jeepneys, tricycles, and other public utility vehicles (PUVs) who are still prohibited from operating.</p> <p>Rep. Francisco Datol Jr. (Party-List, Senior Citizens) urged the Department of Transportation (DOTr) and the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) to already allow the</p>

<p>Continuation... Metro Manila Development</p>	<p>operation of these PUVs in order to provide income to drivers, help restart the economy, and relieve the plight of commuters who had to walk miles just to get to work. He also proposed the immediate creation of bicycle lanes as a healthy alternative to public transportation and where social distancing is not a problem.</p> <p>Rep. Virgilio Lacson (Party-List, MANILA TEACHERS) also commented on the difficulties being experienced by employees and other people needing to go out but with no private transportation. He said that while Metro Manila was downgraded to GCQ and allowed the partial operation of public transportation, traveling to work is still a struggle because not all routes are serviced by these PUVs in operation, which prevents a smooth and continuous journey for commuters.</p> <p>Minority Leader Bienvenido Abante Jr. (6th District, Manila) and Rep. Edgar Erice (2nd District, Caloocan City) asked about the courses of action undertaken by the DOTr on the transition to GCQ. DOTr Undersecretary for Railways Timothy John Batan informed the body that all train lines are open at present. The Philippine National Railways (PNR) operates at 25% to 30% capacity while Metro Rail Transit-3 as well as Light Rail Transits 1 and 2 have a limited capacity of between 12% and 14%. Strict health and safety protocols are also being implemented including social distancing.</p> <p>DOTr Assistant Secretary for Road Transport and Infrastructure Mark Richmond de Leon added that 27,000 taxis were already given permission to operate, and that the LTFRB is targeting to open the entire 31 rationalized routes for city buses by June 19.</p> <p>Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) General Manager Jose Arturo Garcia Jr. and Transport expert and advocate Robert Siy of the Move As One Coalition expressed their support for the establishment of bicycle lanes. Garcia added that number coding scheme is still suspended until further notice due to limited operations of PUVs in Metro Manila under the GCQ.</p> <p>On the other hand, Rep. Bayani Fernando (1st District, Marikina City), Minority Leader Abante, and Rep. Erice do not believe that bicycles can be better alternative modes of transportation saying that only a small number of people actually use them for everyday transport and that it would be unsafe for bicycle riders to use major thoroughfares like EDSA. They emphasized that mass transport system is key.</p> <p>National Center for Commuter Safety and Protection (NCCSP) Chair Elvira Medina echoed the views of the three legislators adding that the creation of bicycle lanes is only appealing now because of limited public transportation under the GCQ.</p> <p>LTFRB Chair Martin Delgra III said that the three key components to move forward are route rationalization, public mass transport, and the PUV Modernization Program (PUVMP).</p> <p>Launched in 2017, the PUVMP is a comprehensive system reform that will entirely change the public land transportation industry. It features a regulatory reform and sets new guidelines for the issuance of franchise for road based public transport services. <i>(Source: LTFRB website)</i></p> <p>On the query of Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) if the LTFRB has data on the losses being incurred per day by PUV drivers and operators and stranded workers due to the limited operation of public transportation, Delgra said that he will submit the exact figures later because his office will have to coordinate with the DOTr for these.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Metro Manila Development</p>		<p>Based on tentative estimates, Rep. Quimbo said only about 17% of the 2.4 million workers who use public transportation are able to go to work every day. This translates to approximately P1 billion losses for the economy per day, she added.</p> <p>Asked on the form of assistance being extended to PUV drivers, DOTr Assistant Secretary for Legal Affairs Mark Steven Pastor replied that a 30% fuel subsidy is already being implemented by the DOTr.</p> <p>On the comment made by Rep. Jesus "Bong" Suntay (4th District, Quezon City) that requiring taxis to install WiFi, Global Positioning System (GPS), and Haul Apps means additional costs to the operators, Delgra said that these are the technical aspects required under the PUVMP. Delgra explained that the GPS, WiFi, and Haul Apps could all be easily installed in and used with a cellphone.</p> <p>Alliance of Concerned Transport Organization (ACTO) President Efren De Luna asked the government to postpone its implementation of the PUVMP and focus instead on solving the present inadequate transport services by getting all PUVs to resume their operations even at a reduced capacity. He also lamented the lack of consultation between the government and the transport groups with regard to the suspension of public transportation during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and the GCQ period. He also complained that not all drivers were able to benefit from the Social Amelioration Program during the lockdown.</p> <p>Alliance of Transport Operators and Drivers Association of the Philippines (ALTODAP) President Melencio Vargas sought clarification on the implementation of a cashless payment scheme and the need for PUVs to secure special permits to be able to operate during the GCQ period even if they have existing permits and registration.</p> <p>Delgra explained that cashless payment is being implemented to lessen the transmission of COVID-19. He also said that the special permit is necessary to prevent PUVs from going back to the road all at the same time. This is in compliance with the guidelines issued by the DOTr which are applicable during the GCQ period.</p> <p>The Committee Chair recommended that a consultative meeting be conducted among the DOTr, LTFRB, MMDA, transport groups, and other stakeholders to thresh out issues and concerns relative to prevailing public transport policies in Metro Manila under the GCQ period.</p>
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