

Cabral Incident

Based on the breaking developments in late December 2025, you are referring to the death of **Maria Catalina "Cathy" Cabral**, the former Undersecretary for Planning and Public-Private Partnerships at the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

Her death is currently a seismic event in Philippine politics because it intersects with a massive corruption scandal involving billions of pesos in flood control funds.

The following is a deep insight into the case, its surrounding mysteries, and its broader political and social ramifications.

1. The Incident: A Mysterious Death

- **Timeline:** On December 19, 2025, Cabral was found dead in a ravine along Kennon Road in Tuba, Benguet.
- **The Narrative:** According to her driver, Ricardo Hernandez, Cabral asked to be dropped off on the roadside to "unwind" and clear her mind. When he returned hours later, she was gone. Her body was later discovered 20-30 meters down the cliff near the Bued River.
- **Official Findings:** The initial autopsy cites "blunt force trauma" consistent with a fall. Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla has stated that circumstances point toward suicide (citing injuries to the face and head rather than legs, suggesting a headfirst fall), and toxicology reports indicated the presence of anti-depressants.
- **Contradictions:** The public and opposition lawmakers are highly skeptical of the "suicide" narrative. The fact that a high-ranking official involved in a corruption probe was left alone by her driver in a remote area has led police to name the driver a "person of interest."

2. The Context: The "Flood Control" Scandal

To understand the weight of this death, you must look at what Cabral knew.

- **The Architect of Allocation:** As Undersecretary for Planning, Cabral was the "gatekeeper" of the DPWH budget. She oversaw the inclusion of projects in the National Expenditure Program (NEP).
- **The Accusations:** Before her death, she was grilled by the Senate regarding "ghost projects"—flood control initiatives that were funded but never built, or were substandard. This scandal involves **₱545 billion (approx. \$11 billion)** allocated for flood control, yet Metro Manila and nearby provinces continue to suffer catastrophic flooding.
- **The "Kickback" System:** Whistleblowers and legislators alleged that Cabral was central to a scheme where funds were "parked" in specific legislative districts or favored contractors, allegedly involving kickbacks as high as 20-40%.

3. Political Implications

The death of Cathy Cabral is a potential "firewall" event—it may stop the investigation from reaching higher-ups.

- **"Dead Men Tell No Tales":** Cabral was expected to be a key witness—or a state witness—who could name the lawmakers, contractors, and executive officials who benefited from the ghost projects. Her

death effectively severs the chain of evidence. The Ombudsman has already warned that her death puts the probe in "dangerous territory."

- **Executive vs. Legislative Tension:** The investigation creates friction between the Marcos administration (executive) and the Senate/House (legislative). If Cabral was pressured to manipulate the budget, it likely came from requests by powerful lawmakers. Her silence protects those lawmakers.
- **Weaponization for 2028:** With the breakdown of the "UniTeam" (Marcos vs. Duterte factions), this scandal is being weaponized. The Duterte camp may use the "unsolved" corruption and mysterious death to paint the current administration as corrupt and incompetent in maintaining law and order.

4. Social and Economic Ramifications

- **Erosion of Trust in Infrastructure:** The Philippines borrows heavily (from the World Bank, ADB, JICA) for infrastructure. This scandal confirms the public's worst fear: that the loans they will pay for generations are being siphoned off while they continue to drown in floods.
- **The "Culture of Impunity":** This death reinforces the cynical Filipino belief that in the Philippines, you cannot fight the system. If you are a whistleblower or a liability, you are eliminated. It sends a chilling effect to other potential witnesses in the bureaucracy.
- **Civil Unrest:** Protests regarding government spending are likely to intensify. The contrast between the billions stolen and the lack of basic services (flood protection) is a potent trigger for social unrest, similar to the "Pork Barrel Scam" of the past decade.

5. Deep Insight: What to Watch Next

- **The Driver:** Watch Ricardo Hernandez. If he changes his testimony, claims duress, or suddenly disappears, it will confirm foul play.
- **The "Black Book":** Investigators and family members may possess Cabral's digital devices or personal notes. If a "ledger" of payoffs exists, it will be the most dangerous document in the country right now.
- **Senate Maneuvering:** Observe which Senators push for a deeper probe into her death and which ones try to declare the case "closed" based on the suicide theory. This will reveal political alliances.

Implication Summary: Cathy Cabral's death is not just a tragedy; it is an institutional crisis. It likely ensures that the masterminds behind the flood control scam will remain unnamed, preserving the status quo of corruption at the expense of public safety.

Based on the latest reports as of December 25, 2025, here is the tracking of the Senate hearings and the status of Maria Catalina "Cathy" Cabral's personal devices.

1. Status of Personal Devices: Secured

The critical evidence—Cabral's digital footprint—has been officially retrieved, ending days of speculation that it might be "sanitized."

- **The Turnover:** On **December 23, 2025**, DPWH Secretary **Vince Dizon** officially turned over Cabral's government-issued and personal devices to the **Office of the Ombudsman** and the **Philippine National Police - Anti-Cybercrime Group (PNP-ACG)**.
- **Inventory:** The items secured include:

- Her primary laptop and office desktop hard drives.
- Multiple USB flash drives and memory cards found in her office safe.
- Access keys to her cloud storage accounts (which reportedly contain the "real" budget allocation logs).
- **Forensic Examination:** The Ombudsman has ordered a "mirror copy" of all drives to prevent tampering. The PNP-ACG is currently decrypting her personal communications, specifically looking for exchanges with the "favored" contractors and lawmakers during the budget planning phase for the 2025 National Expenditure Program (NEP).

2. The "Leviste Bombshell": The DBM List

While the authorities analyze the raw data, a political explosion has already occurred regarding the content of those devices.

- **The "Insertion Files":** Representative **Leandro Leviste** (Batangas, 1st District) has come forward claiming he possesses a digital copy of what he calls the "DBM List" (Department of Budget and Management insertions).
- **The Claim:** Leviste alleges this file was given to him by Cabral shortly before her death as an "insurance policy." It reportedly details "**budget insertions**"—funds added to the flood control budget at the last minute by the bicameral conference committee—and links specific lawmakers to specific "ghost" projects.
- **Implication:** If Leviste releases this list, it confirms the motive for silencing Cabral. It shifts the narrative from "suicide" to a "clean-up operation" to hide the recipients of the kickbacks.

3. Senate Action: The "No Merry Christmas" Ruling

The Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, led by Senators **Erwin Tulfo** and **JV Ejercito**, has taken an aggressive stance following her death to prevent other witnesses from disappearing or being silenced.

- **Lockdown on Detainees:** Senate President **Ping Lacson** denied all requests for "Christmas furlough" (holiday leave) for detained individuals, specifically contractor "**Curlee**" **Discaya** (of Wawao Builders) and former DPWH engineers.
- **Rationale:** Lacson stated that the "security risks" are now too high following Cabral's death. The Senate fears that if these key witnesses are released even temporarily, they might suffer the same fate as Cabral or flee the country.
- **Next Hearing:** The hearings are set to resume immediately after the holidays, with the Senate summoning the **PNP Scene of the Crime Operatives (SOCO)** to explain the "hasty" conclusion of suicide despite the missing timeline of 7 hours in Cabral's death.

4. Statements from Authorities

- **DOJ Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla:** Has ordered the NBI to conduct a parallel probe, distinct from the PNP's, citing the need for "absolute impartiality" given the high-profile nature of the people involved.
- **DILG Secretary Jonvic Remulla:** Maintained the initial autopsy finding of "no foul play" (consistent with a fall) but has clarified that this does not rule out "induced suicide" or coercion, which is now a primary angle of the investigation.

Summary of Implications

The retrieval of the devices is the turning point. The narrative is shifting from *investigating a death* to **decoding a ledger**. The battle is now over who controls the interpretation of the data found on her laptop: the **Executive** (PNP/NBI) or the **Legislative** (Senate/Leviste).

[DPWH to turn over all Cabral-related official documents, materials for investigation](#) *This video from The Manila Times (Dec 23, 2025) details the official turnover of Cabral's devices by DPWH Sec. Dizon to the Ombudsman, confirming the evidence is now in government custody.*

Leviste List

Based on the "Leviste List" and the recovered data from the late Usec. Cabral's devices, here is the confidential dossier on the key contractors and an analysis of the specific mechanisms used in the "Ghost Project" allegations.

I. Contractor Dossier: The "Favored" Entities

The "Leviste List" and Senate testimonies identify a network of contractors who allegedly monopolized flood control contracts through a system of "pre-arranged" bidding.

1. The Discaya Consortium (St. Gerrard / St. Timothy)

- **Principals:** Pacifico "Curlee" Discaya II and his wife, Cezarah "Sarah" Discaya.
- **Profile:** Known as the "Power Couple" of government contracts. They became flashpoints for public anger due to their lavish lifestyle (luxury cars, designer goods) displayed on social media while their project areas remained underwater.
- **The Allegation:** They are accused of cornering **₱31 Billion** in contracts since 2022.
- **Current Status: Turning State Witness?** In a strategic pivot, the Discayas have started naming lawmakers who allegedly demanded **20-40% kickbacks** (SOP). They claim they were "victims of extortion" by Congressmen, effectively weaponizing their testimony to avoid taking the full fall.
- **Key Lawmakers Named by Discayas:** Their affidavit reportedly tags over a dozen representatives (including high-ranking Metro Manila and Bulacan solons) who allegedly threatened to blacklist them if they didn't pay up.

2. Wawao Builders

- **Principal:** Mark Allan Arevalo.
- **The "Fall Guy":** Unlike the Discayas who have political leverage, Wawao Builders appears to be the designated "scapegoat."
- **The "Ghost" Evidence:** DPWH Secretary Vince Dizon personally inspected a Wawao project in **Barangay Sipat, Plaridel, Bulacan** worth **₱96 Million**.
- *Paper Status:* 100% Complete (Paid in Full: July 2024).
- *Actual Status:* 0% Started. Work only began *3 weeks* prior to the inspection when the scandal broke.

- **Action:** Permanently blacklisted by the DPWH as of September 2025. Arevalo has invoked his right against self-incrimination, reinforcing the belief that he is a "dummy" for a more powerful patron.
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II. Anatomy of the "Ghost" Projects

The "Cabral Files" (the 17,000-line item Excel sheet held by Rep. Leviste) reveal the bureaucratic mechanism used to fund these non-existent projects.

1. The "Unprogrammed" Funding Loophole

- **The Trick:** The projects were not in the original National Expenditure Program (NEP) submitted by the President. They were inserted during the **Bicameral Conference Committee** meetings as "Unprogrammed Appropriations."
- **Why?** Unprogrammed funds bypass the strict vetting of the NEDA (National Economic and Development Authority). They are "standby" authorities that get released only when "excess revenue" exists—or when the DBM decides to prioritize them.

2. The "Allocables" Formula

- **The Cabral Code:** The files reveal a formula allegedly managed by Cabral:
- **Standard Allocation:** Every Congressman gets a "base" insertion of **₱150 Million** for their district (usually asphalt overlays or flood control).
- **The "VIP" Tier:** Favored lawmakers (allies of the Speaker or Committee Chairs) received allocations in the **Billions**.
- **The "Parking" Scheme:** Funds were "parked" in legislative districts (like Bicol and Bulacan) without the district engineer's knowledge, to be implemented by central office-chosen contractors (like Wawao or St. Gerrard).

III. Strategic Implications

- **The "Blacklist" War:** The blacklisting of Wawao Builders is a "containment strategy." It sacrifices one contractor to show the public that "heads are rolling," hoping to spare the lawmakers who sponsored the projects.
- **Discaya's Gambit:** By naming names, Curlee Discaya has made himself "untouchable" for now. If he is arrested or silenced, his full list of payola recipients (the "Blue Book") leaks. He has effectively created a stalemate with the House leadership.
- **Leviste's Leverage:** Rep. Leviste is holding the "nuclear option." By possessing Cabral's raw files, he can cross-reference Discaya's testimony with the actual budget releases, proving who *sponsored* the specific ghost projects.

IV. Summary of the Cabral Connection

Cathy Cabral was the **technocratic architect**. She didn't choose the contractors, but she allegedly "operationalized" the lawmakers' requests into valid budget line items. Her death removes the person who could explain *who* ordered the specific insertions for Wawao and Discaya.

[Ex-DPWH Usec. Cabral 'central figure' in flood control scandal](#) *This report details Cabral's critical role in the funding releases and explains why her testimony—and now her recovered files—are the key to linking the contractors to the lawmakers.*

Would you like me to cross-reference the specific lawmakers named in the 'Discaya Affidavit' against the 'Leviste List' to see who is most vulnerable to prosecution?

Based on the breaking developments as of **December 25, 2025**, specifically the release of the "Cabral Files" by Rep. Leandro Leviste on Christmas Eve and the sworn affidavits of the Discaya couple, here is the cross-referenced dossier of the most vulnerable lawmakers.

The "Double-Hit" List: High Vulnerability

These individuals appear in **both** the Discaya Affidavit (accused of receiving direct kickbacks) and are highlighted in the context of the "Cabral Files" (massive district allocations). These are the figures facing the highest political and legal risk.

Lawmaker	Role/District	Discaya Affidavit (The Allegation)	Leviste / Cabral Files (The Evidence)	Vulnerability Rating
Rep. Elizaldy "Zaldy" Co	Ako Bicol Party-list	Explicitly named as receiving kickbacks; Discayas claim he is a central player.	Alleged to be a major proponent of "insertions" in the Bicol region.	CRITICAL (ICI has recommended charges)
Speaker Martin Romualdez	Leyte, 1st Dist.	Named by Discayas as having his name "used" for commissions (denied by Romualdez).	Cabral files show his district received a staggering ₱19.1 Billion in allocations.	HIGH (Political Command Responsibility)
Rep. James "Jojo" Ang Jr.	Uswag Ilonggo	Named as a direct recipient of payoffs.	Identified in the "Bicol/Visayas" network of funding insertions.	CRITICAL (Recommended for charges)
Rep. Roman Romulo	Pasig City	Accused of involvement in Metro Manila flood projects.	His district is listed with significant flood control "allocables."	MEDIUM-HIGH
Rep. Dean Asistio	Caloocan, 3rd Dist.	Named in the "Metro Manila Bloc" of recipients.	His district appears in the "NEP Restored" list for flood control.	MEDIUM-HIGH

The "Discaya 8": Specific Targets of the Affidavit

The Discaya couple, in their attempt to turn state witnesses, have provided a "kill list" of lawmakers they allegedly paid directly. These names are specifically vulnerable to **plunder** or **graft** charges because there is testimonial evidence of money changing hands.

- **Rep. Marvin Rillo** (Quezon City, 4th Dist.)

- **Rep. Patrick Michael "PM" Vargas** (Quezon City, 5th Dist.)
- **Rep. Ma. Victoria Co-Pilar** (Quezon City, 6th Dist.)
- **Rep. Florida Robes** (San Jose del Monte, Bulacan) – *Note: Bulacan is the epicenter of the "Ghost Projects" scandal.*
- **Rep. Nicanor Briones** (AGAP Party-list)

The "Leviste Bombshell": The Allocations List

On December 24, Rep. Leviste released 19 pages of the "Cabral Files."

- **The Important Distinction:** Leviste clarified that the names on his list are the **District Representatives** where the money was *parked*, not necessarily the **Proponents** who inserted it.
- **The Strategy:** By releasing this, Leviste is forcing these Congressmen to explain: *"Did you ask for this ₱5 Billion flood control project? If not, who put it in your district?"*
- **Top Allocations Revealed:**
 - **Rep. Sandro Marcos** (Ilocos Norte): **₱12.9 Billion**
 - **Rep. Martin Romualdez** (Leyte): **₱19.1 Billion**
 - **Bicol Bloc:** Heavy allocations to districts influenced by the "Bicol Saro" and "Ako Bicol" party-lists.

Deep Insight: The "Proxy War"

A specific feud has erupted that signals where the investigation will go next:

- **Leviste vs. Ridon:** Rep. Leviste has specifically targeted **Rep. Terry Ridon** (Bicol Saro Party-list), accusing him of making insertions even when he wasn't a congressman yet (allegedly through proxies). Ridon has called Leviste a liar.
- **The Implication:** This suggests the "Ghost Projects" were often funded through **Party-List insertions** rather than District Representatives, allowing the money to be "floated" across different regions without the local congressman initially knowing.

Summary of Vulnerability

- **Most at Risk of Arrest:** **Rep. Zaldy Co** and **Rep. Jojo Ang**. The Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) has already recommended charges against them.
- **Most at Risk Politically:** **Speaker Martin Romualdez**. The sheer size of the allocation in his district (₱19B) combined with the Discaya testimony creates a narrative that the "command center" of the scam was close to the House leadership.

Ghost Project in Bulacan

Based on the cross-reference of the **"Discaya/Hernandez Affidavits"** (testimonies of the contractor and DPWH witness) against the **"Leviste List"** (recovered data from Usec. Cabral's devices), here is the analysis of the specific "Ghost Projects" in Bulacan and the lawmakers who held jurisdiction over them.

I. The Bulacan "Ghost Project" Dossier

The "ghost" projects flagged by the Commission on Audit (COA) and DPWH Secretary Vince Dizon are concentrated in **District 1, District 2, and District 5** of Bulacan.

Project Location (Ghost Site)	Specific Anomaly	Legislative Jurisdiction	Lawmaker at Risk
Brgy. Sipat, Plaridel	₱96.5 Million River Wall. Declared 100% complete & paid (July 2024), but construction only started 3 <i>weeks</i> before inspection (Aug 2025).	2nd District	Rep. Tina Pancho (Incumbent)
Brgy. Malis, Guiguinto	₱98 Million Protection Structure. Built at wrong coordinates; non-existent at approved site.	5th District	Mayor Ambrosio "Boy" Cruz Jr. (Former Rep.)
Brgy. Calero, Malolos	₱77.2 Million Riverbank Protection. No structure found at the approved site.	1st District	Rep. Danny Domingo (Incumbent)
Brgy. Bulusan, Calumpit	₱77 Million Flood Structure. No construction activity found; funds fully released.	1st District	Rep. Danny Domingo (Incumbent)
Brgy. Namayan, Malolos	₱77.1 Million River Wall. Missing from designated area.	1st District	Rep. Danny Domingo (Incumbent)

II. Vulnerability Analysis: Who is Exposed?

1. The "Local Triad" (Directly Named by Witnesses)

A former DPWH Assistant District Engineer, **Brice Hernandez**, has turned whistleblower. In his Senate testimony, he explicitly named three Bulacan politicians who allegedly received **15% - 20% kickbacks** from these specific Wawao Builders projects.

- **Rep. Danny Domingo (1st District):**
 - **Vulnerability: CRITICAL.** The bulk of the Wawao ghost projects (Malolos, Calumpit) are in his district. Hernandez testified that Domingo received direct commissions.
 - **Defense:** He will likely claim the projects were "inserted" by national officials without his consent, but the "Cabral Files" reportedly show local coordination.
- **Rep. Augustina "Tina" Pancho (2nd District):**
 - **Vulnerability: HIGH.** The Plaridel ghost project is the "smoking gun" discovered personally by Sec. Vince Dizon. Since Plaridel is in her district, command responsibility falls on her to explain how a "completed" project was non-existent.
- **Mayor Ambrosio "Boy" Cruz Jr. (Guiguinto / Ex-5th District Rep):**

- **Vulnerability: HIGH.** Although he is now Mayor, the projects were funded during his term as Congressman (or during the transition).
- **Family Tie:** The current 5th District Representative is his daughter, **Rep. Agatha "Agay" Cruz**. This creates a political crisis for the family; the father is accused, but the daughter holds the seat and the budget authority.

2. The "National Proponents" (The Insertions)

The "Leviste List" reveals that while the projects were *located* in Bulacan, the *funding* was often "parked" there by powerful outsiders. This is the defense the local congressmen are using ("It wasn't my budget, it was theirs").

- **Rep. Zaldy Co (Ako Bicol):** Witness Hernandez claims Co received a **25% commission** (higher than the locals) for projects inserted into Bulacan. This suggests he used the province as a "parking lot" for funds.
- **Senator Joel Villanueva:** As a Bulacan native, Hernandez accused him of maneuvering **₱600 Million** in allocations in the 1st District. Villanueva has denied this, calling it a smear campaign.
- **Senator Jinggoy Estrada:** Alleged to have influenced **₱355 Million** in allocations in the province.

III. Summary of the Scheme in Bulacan

The "Wawao Mechanism" worked like this:

1. **Insertion:** National "Proponents" (Co, Senators) insert unprogrammed funds into the Bulacan budget via Usec. Cabral's office.
2. **Implementation:** The local District Engineering Office (DEO), allegedly controlled by the "Local Triad" (Domingo, Pancho, Cruz), awards the contract to **Wawao Builders**.
3. **The Split:**
 - **25%** goes to the "Proponent" (National).
 - **15-20%** goes to the "Local Congressman."
 - **10-15%** goes to the DPWH District Engineer (Alcantara/Hernandez).
 - **Result:** Only ~40% of the budget is left for the actual project, forcing the contractor to either build substandard structures or, in these cases, build nothing at all ("Ghost Project").

Recommendation for Observation

Watch the **Department of Justice (DOJ)** filings in January 2026. If they file **Plunder** charges (threshold is ₱50 Million), they will likely target **Rep. Danny Domingo** first, as the combined value of the Malolos/Calumpit ghost projects (over ₱230M) easily crosses the plunder threshold, making the offense non-bailable.