The Bureau of Fire Protection ("BFP") is one of the most undermanned agencies of the government. Its current manpower is below the ideal ratio of one (1) firefighter per two thousand (2,000) population. In fact, the actual number of firefighters in the country is dismaying described as "short by more than 100 percent."3

This shortage in the number of not just firefighters but also fire trucks is augmented by volunteer fire brigades.4 As recognized by the Public Information Office of BFP-National Capital Region ("NCR"), volunteer fire brigades are their agency’s "force multipliers."

As of March 2018, there are a total of 813 fire brigades with a total of 4,525 volunteer firefighters in the entire NCR.5 These are divided into 578 fire brigades with 10,034 volunteer firefighters and 235 barangay fire brigades with 644 volunteer firefighters. Volunteer fire brigades even have more fire trucks and more firefighters than the BFP.6

Just like Fire Officers of the BFP, fire volunteers battle fires, aid in search and rescue efforts, and provide emergency medical services. Needless to say, these volunteers also put their own lives at risk in order to protect the public at large. They themselves are seriously injured, or, worse killed, in the spirit of pure volunteerism. Their devotion is further tested during this pandemic as these fire volunteers are also in the frontline together with the Fire Officers of the BFP. Aside from battling fires and providing emergency medical services, these fire volunteers also help ration water to areas without constant water supply.

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2 Id.

3 Id.

4 Id.

5 Id.

Unlike Fire Officers, however, fire volunteers do not receive regular salaries. At best, they only receive allowances or honoraria.

In recognition of the valuable role of fire volunteers in Philippine society, this legislation seeks to require local government units ("LGUs") to provide fire volunteers with health insurance from reputable private health maintenance organizations ("HMOs"). Through this, our beloved fire volunteers will need not worry about their treatment or hospitalization should they encounter harm during the performance of their dangerous activities. This legislation also aims to strengthen the values and spirit of volunteerism among our Kababayans especially during these trying times.

In view of the foregoing, passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

HON. ALLAN BENEDICT S. REYES
Representative
3rd District, Quezon City
AN ACT REQUIRING LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS TO PROVIDE FIRE VOLUNTEERS WITH HEALTH INSURANCE FROM REPUTABLE PRIVATE HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATIONS (HMOs) AND Appropriating FUNDS THEREFOR

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled

SECTION 1. Short Title.—This Act shall be known as the “Fire Volunteers Health Insurance Act of 2020.”

SECTION 2. Coverage.—This Act shall cover all members of the Association of Philippine Volunteer Fire Brigades, Inc. or any BFP duly accredited volunteer fire brigades in the Philippines.

SECTION 3. Additional Health Insurance.—The private health insurance provided in this Act shall be in addition to those already provided under Republic Act No. 9241 or An Act Amending Republic Act No. 7875, otherwise known as “An Act Instituting A National Health Insurance Program for All Filipinos and Establishing the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation for the Purpose” and Republic Act No. 11223, otherwise known as “An Act Instituting Universal Health Care for All Filipinos, Prescribing Reforms in the Health Care System, and Appropriating Funds Therefor.”

SECTION 4. Sponsored Members.—Fire Volunteers, for purposes of the Philhealth registration and contribution, shall be considered as sponsored members. The needed premium contributions for fire volunteers shall be fully borne by their respective LGUs.

SECTION 5. Creation of the Fire Volunteers Health Insurance Fund.—There is hereby created a Fire Volunteers Health Insurance Fund that shall consist of appropriations earmarked by the concerned LGUs purposely for the implementation of this Act. Disbursements from the said Fund shall be subject to the usual accounting and budgeting rules and regulations.

SECTION 6. Implementing Rules and Regulations.—Within sixty (60) days from the promulgation of this Act, the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of its provisions shall be formulated by the appropriate government office.
or agency in coordination with all the stakeholders and covered establishments and institutions.

SECTION 7. Repealing Clause. – All laws, executive orders, administrative orders, rules, regulations, decrees, and other issuances or parts thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby revoked, repealed, or modified accordingly.

SECTION 8. Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall continue in operation and remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 9. Effectivity Clause. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication the Official Gazette or in the two (2) national newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,