

# Committee Daily Bulletin

17<sup>th</sup> Congress  
Third Regular Session

A publication of the Committee Affairs Department

Vol. III No. 62  
December 11, 2018

| ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING              |  |  |
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| COMMITTEE                           | SUBJECT MATTER                                 | DISCUSSIONS  |
| Senior Citizens (Special Committee) | Approval of the Committee's Rules of Procedure | <p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Imelda Marcos (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Ilocos Norte), adopted its Rules of Procedure for the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress.</p> <p>The Committee, which is presently composed of 20 members, has general jurisdiction on all matters directly and principally relating to the needs and welfare of senior citizens as well as policies and programs that will enhance their active participation in society.</p> |

| COMMITTEE MEETINGS                        |          |                    |  |  |
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| COMMITTEE                                 | MEASURES |                    | SUBJECT MATTER   | ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION  |
|   | NO.      | PRINCIPAL AUTHOR   |  |  |
| Information and Communications Technology | HB 7410  | Deputy Speaker Yap | Mandating the wireless telecom companies to transfer five-year-old cell towers to Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) corporations   | <p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Victor Yap (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Tarlac), approved HB 7410 subject to style.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Arthur Yap (3<sup>rd</sup> District, Bohol), author of HB 7410, said that his bill seeks to mandate all telcos to transfer their cell towers to REIT corporations to allow new investments in wireless telecommunications infrastructure. This, according to the Deputy Speaker, will increase the number of cell sites in the country, thus provide better internet service to the consumers.</p> <p>RA 9856 or the REIT Act of 2009 defined "REIT" as a stock corporation principally for the purpose of owning income-generating real estate assets.</p> <p>The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Office of the Presidential Adviser on ICT, and the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) expressed support for HB 7410.</p> <p>Also in support of the measure were representatives from Globe, Smart and the Philippine Cable TV Association (PCTA).</p> |
|   | HR 938   | Rep. Pineda        | Inquiry into the submitted roll out plans of the telecommunication companies (telcos) relative to addressing the backlog of cell sites with the end in view of enacting regulations to support efforts that would ensure the improvement of the state of Philippine telecommunications | The Committee adopted HR 938.  |

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| Continuation...<br>Information and<br>Communications<br>Technology  | HB 4093             | Rep. Teves        | Mandating the authentication of online and social media memberships in the country through registration of their accounts using any valid government-issued identification and/or barangay certificate  | <p>The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the four measures.</p> <p>Rep. Arnolfo "Arnie" Teves Jr. (3<sup>rd</sup> District, Negros Oriental), author of HB 4093, said that his bill requires a mandatory authentication process for all social media and other similar online accounts enjoyed by users in the country. Rep. Teves said that it also aims to ensure accountability on the part of the social media account owner.</p>   |
|   | HB 5021             | Rep. Alvarez (P.) | Regulating the use of social media, prescribing penalties for violations thereof  | <p>The DICT, Department of Justice (DOJ), Philippine National Police (PNP), and the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) support the regulation of the use of social media.</p> <p>PNP Director for ICT Management Cesar Hawthorne Binag said that the proposed law will help prevent cybercrimes, which to him are difficult to address because the perpetrators cannot be easily identified.</p>  |
|   | HR 777              | Rep. Alvarez (P.) | Investigation into the failure of various social media networks to provide an effective method or system to ascertain the authenticity of accounts registered with them, leading to prevalence of fake, malicious, and spurious social media accounts, which results to unchecked and rampant acts of online identity theft | <p>On the other hand, representatives of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the National Privacy Commission (NPC) expressed concern over possible violation of the account users' privacy rights.</p> <p>The Committee requested the resource persons to submit their respective position papers on the proposed measure.</p>   |
|   | Privilege Speech 66 | Rep. Teves        | On bashing on social media  |   |
| Information and Communications Technology jt. w/ Trade and Industry | HB 8001             | Rep. Salo         | Enabling the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) through the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) to cancel licenses of internet service providers (ISPs) that allow websites to infringe or to facilitate infringement of copyright   | <p>The Joint Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Victor Yap (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Tarlac), Chair of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, and Camiguin Rep. Xavier Jesus Romualdo, Vice Chair of the Committee on Trade and Industry, agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to fine-tune the bill.</p> <p>The TWG will be chaired by Rep. Ron Salo (Party-List, KABAYAN).</p> <p>Rep. Salo, main author of HB 8001, explained that the bill authorizes the NTC, upon recommendation of the IPO, to cancel the license of ISPs that allow websites to infringe or to facilitate infringement of copyrighted materials.</p> <p>IPO PHL Deputy Director General Teodoro Pascua expressed support for the bill, saying that it will address the problem on copyright infringement. He requested that the agency be given ample time to submit its recommendations to the proposed law.</p> |
| Legislative Franchises  | HB 5030             | Rep. Maceda       | Renewing for another 25 years the franchise granted to Audiovisual Communicators, Inc. under RA 8124  | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Franz "Chicoy" Alvarez (1 <sup>st</sup> District, Palawan), approved the Committee Report on HB 5030.  |
|   | HCR 23              | Rep. Cua          | Approving the transfer, sale, or assignment of the controlling interest of Mindanao Islamic Telephone Company, Inc. (Mislattel)   | The Committee approved HCR 23 and the corresponding Committee Report.   |

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| Local Government        | HB 8433                               | Rep. Arcillas  | Separating the City of Santa Rosa from the first legislative district of the Province of Laguna to constitute the lone legislative district of the City of Santa Rosa   | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Pedro Acharon Jr. (1 <sup>st</sup> District, South Cotabato and General Santos City), approved HB 8433.  |
|                         | HB 248                                | Rep. Bordado   | Strengthening the barangay unit through support for barangay officials and barangay volunteer workers, amending RA 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, providing funds therefor   | The Committee agreed to consolidate the seven bills with HB 248 as the lead bill.<br><br>Representatives of the <i>Liga ng mga Barangay sa Pilipinas</i> and League of Cities of the Philippines expressed their support for the bills.   |
|                         | HBs 297, 331, 1627, 1958, 7615 & 7872 | Reps. Suansing (H.), Romualdo, Tambunting, Rodriguez (M.), and Benitez | Changing the term of office of elective barangay officials and members of the Sangguniang Kabataan from three years to five years, amending for the purpose Section 43 of RA 7160, as amended, and RA 9164, or the law providing for synchronized barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections, as amended |   |
|                         | HB 7955                               | Rep. Vergara   | Creating a barangay to be known as Barangay Bagong Buhay in the City of Palayan, Province of Nueva Ecija  | The Committee deferred consideration of HB 7955.<br><br>Rep. Acharon informed the Committee that the creation of a barangay, as proposed in the measure, does not meet the population requirement of at least 2,000 inhabitants pursuant to Section 386 of the Local Government Code.<br><br>Philippine Statistics Authority's (PSA) Supervising Statistical Specialist Raul Ludovice confirmed that the proposed Barangay Bagong Buhay has a total population of only 963 based on the 2015 Census of Population (POPCEN 2015).  |
| Public Order and Safety | HB 8313                               | Rep. Pineda  | Allowing for single party consensual recording in law enforcement   | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Romeo Acop (2 <sup>nd</sup> District, Antipolo City), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to deliberate further on HB 8313.<br><br>Rep. Leopoldo Bataoil (2 <sup>nd</sup> District, Pangasinan) was designated as TWG Chair.<br><br>As stated by the authors in the bill's explanatory note, in consensual recording, an officer makes a telephone call or proceeds to a face to face meeting and personally records his conversations with a person of interest without need of a court order. In this type of evidence gathering, the law enforcement officer or the person under his authority makes the recording of a conversation to which they are parties and in which a crime is being committed or discussed. This is deemed an effective tool in prosecuting or even preventing crimes.<br><br>Representatives from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC), National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM), Philippine Center on Transnational Crime (PCTC), and the Philippine National Police (PNP), |

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| Continuation...<br>Public Order<br>and Safety |  |  |  | <p>expressed their support for the bill, with some of them presenting their comments and suggestions.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Makmod Mending Jr. (Party-List, AMIN) on his thoughts about the bill, DOJ State Counsel Jose Janello Covarrubias said that while the DOJ acknowledges the compelling state interest to conduct surveillance and collect evidence to speed up the prosecution of certain crimes, the means to do these should still be within the constitutional limitation of securing a search warrant or court order prior to the conduct of surveillance using methods such as wiretapping.</p> <p>Rep. Enrico Pineda (Party-List, 1-PACMAN), principal author of HB 8313, clarified that the bill covers only criminal cases and not administrative or civil cases.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their respective position papers on the bill for consideration by the TWG. The secretariat was also instructed to ensure the attendance in the next meeting of invited top officials of government agencies who were not able to attend today's meeting.</p> |
| Senior Citizens<br>(Special<br>Committee)     | HBs 4022,<br>4635, 8238,<br>8242, 8280,<br>8298, 8307,<br>8335, 8473,<br>8561 & 8593 | Reps.<br>Suansing (E.),<br>Suansing (H.),<br>Nieto, Sy-<br>Alvarado,<br>Erice,<br>Alejano,<br>Marcos, and<br>Cagas | Amending RA 7432, as amended, otherwise known as the Expanded Senior Citizen's Act of 2010 (by providing a comprehensive system of benefits, government assistance and subsidies and other privileges for senior citizens)   | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Imelda Marcos (2 <sup>nd</sup> District, Ilocos Norte), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the 11 bills and come up with a substitute bill.  |
|   | HBs 8208,<br>8274, & 8559  | Reps. Go (M.),<br>Calixto-<br>Rubiano,<br>and Zamora<br>(R.)   | Amending RA 10868, or the law honoring and granting additional benefits, and privileges to Filipino centenarians (by advancing the grant of the centenarians' cash gift of P100,000, in portions of the amount, upon reaching the ages of 80, 85, 90, 95 and 100 years; and by providing for an automatic annual adjustment of the centenarians' gift) | The Committee agreed to create a TWG to consolidate the three bills and come up with a substitute bill.  |
| Trade and<br>Industry                         | Substitute Bill<br>to HB 4595  | Deputy<br>Speaker Yap  | Amending RA 8762, otherwise known as the Retail Trade Liberalization Act (by removing the equity and capitalization requirements in the law to create a more favorable investment climate in the country)  | <p>The Committee, presided by Vice Chair Rep. Xavier Jesus Romualdo (Camiguin), approved the Substitute Bill to HB 4595 subject to style and amendment.</p> <p>The Secretariat was directed to prepare the corresponding Committee Report.</p>   |
| Ways and<br>Means                             | Substitute Bill<br>to HBs 1029<br>& 1288   | Reps. Manalo<br>and Baguilat   | Establishing the scope and procedure for Philippine ship registry, recognition and enforcement of maritime claims, and limitation of liability, as well as providing essential incentives, which collectively will promote a comprehensive and orderly Philippine Ship Registry System for the regulation of vessels carrying the flag state           | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Estrellita Suansing (1 <sup>st</sup> District, Nueva Ecija), approved the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HBs 1029 and 1288 with amendments.   |

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| Continuation...<br>Ways and Means | Substitute Bill to HB 1419         | Rep. Garcia                   | Creating the Manila Bay Development Authority, prescribing its powers, functions and duties, providing funds therefor   | The Committee approved the tax provision of the Substitute Bill to HB 1419.   |
|                                   | Substitute Bill to HB 2430         | Rep. Villafuerte              | Creating the Sustainable Bicol River Development Authority, prescribing its powers, functions and duties, providing funds therefor  | The Committee approved the tax provision of the Substitute Bill to HB 2430.   |
|                                   | Substitute Bill to HBs 3518 & 3557 | Reps. Arcillas and Go         | Expanding the coverage of the exemption from the payment of travel tax, amending for the purpose PD 1183 or the law amending and consolidating the provisions on travel tax of RA 1478, as amended, and RA 6141, as amended, prescribing the manner of collection thereof, providing penalties for violations thereof | The Committee approved the tax provision of the Substitute Bill to HBs 3518 and 3557 with amendments.                                 |
|                                   | Substitute Bill to HB 7629         | Rep. Villafuerte              | Enabling banks to expand service delivery channels through cash agents and providing guidelines therefor  | The Committee approved the tax provision of the Substitute Bill to HB 7629 with amendments.   |
|                                   | Substitute Bills to HB 2672        | Rep. Pimentel                 | Establishing the special economic zone in the City of Bislig, Province of Surigao Del Sur, creating for this purpose the Bislig Special Economic Zone Authority and appropriating funds therefor  | The Committee approved the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HB 2672.  |
|                                   | Substitute Bill to HB 5034         | Rep. Lanete                   | Establishing the special economic zone in the Municipality of Placer, Province of Masbate, creating for this purpose the Placer Special Economic Zone Authority, appropriating funds therefor   | The Committee approved the tax provisions of the Substitute Bill to HB 5034.  |
|                                   | HB 122                             | Rep. Lobregat                 | Creating the Mindanao Power Corporation and providing funds therefor  | The Committee approved the tax provisions of HB 122.  |
|                                   | HB 4415                            | Rep. Baguilat                 | Recognizing and institutionalizing Indigenous People's Educational (IPED) systems within the Philippine educational systems, establishing the guidelines for the accreditation, management and evaluation of learning institutions serving IP learners, and appropriating funds therefor                              | The Committee approved the tax provisions of HB 4415.   |
| Youth and Sports Development      | Substitute Bill to HBs 2649 & 5619 | Reps. Gatchalian and Yap (V.) | Providing for the Magna Carta of the Out-of-School Youth  | The Committee, chaired by Rep. Conrado Estrella III (Party-List, ABONO), approved the substitute bill subject to style and amendment. |
|                                   | HB 8317                            | Rep. Velasco                  | Establishing the Marinduque Sports Academy and Training Center in Barangay Baliis, Municipality of Sta. Cruz, Province of Marinduque  | The Committee approved HB 8317 subject to style and amendment.  |
|                                   | HR 2277                            | Rep. Sambar                   | Commending and congratulating Christian Tio for winning a silver medal in Boys' International Kiteboarding  | The Committee adopted HR 2277.  |

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| Continuation...<br>Youth and Sports Development |   |                                      | Association (IKA) Twin Tip: Racing of the sailing event of the 2018 Summer Youth Olympic Games held in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 14 October 2018  |   |
|   | Consolidated Resolution on HRs 2289 & 2299                                  | Reps. Vargas and Sambar              | Commending and congratulating Carlos Yulo for winning a bronze medal in the floor exercise final of the 2018 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships held on 25 October to 3 November 2018 in Aspire Academy Dome in Doha, Qatar   | The Committee adopted the Consolidated Resolution on HRs 2289 and 2299. |
|   | HR 2293, in consolidation with HRs 2239, 2240, 2244, 2245, 2256-2259 & 2276 | Reps. Estrella, Sambar, and Roa-Puno | Commending and congratulating Filipino athletes for winning gold medals in various sports in the 2018 Asian Paralympic Games held in Jakarta, Indonesia from 6-13 October 2018, and their coaches and the officials of the Philippine Paralympic Committee (PPC) for their able mentorship and support | The Committee adopted the consolidated resolution.                      |

| TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING          |              |                          |   |  |
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| COMMITTEE                                | MEASURES     |                          | SUBJECT MATTER  | ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION   |
|  | NO.          | PRINCIPAL AUTHOR         |   |  |
| Ways and Means (Technical Working Group) | HB 8171      | Rep. Quimbo              | Providing for the automatic suspension of the excise tax on fuel and repealing the excise tax imposed on kerosene and diesel under RA 10963, otherwise known as the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN), amending for the purpose the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of 1997, as amended   | <p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Rep. Romero "Miro" Quimbo (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Marikina City), terminated its deliberations on the seven measures.</p> <p>The TWG solicited the position of the Department of Finance (DOF) regarding the measures which seek to review and suspend the implementation of the scheduled increase in fuel excise tax as provided for in RA 10963 or the TRAIN Law.</p> <p>DOF Undersecretary Karl Kendrick Chua said that the Department recommends the implementation of the second round of fuel tax increase next year considering that the price of Dubai crude oil is lower than the US\$80 per barrel threshold prescribed in Section 43 of the TRAIN Law.</p> <p>Section 43 provides that the excise tax on fuel shall be suspended when the average Dubai crude oil for three months prior to the scheduled increase of the month reaches or exceeds US\$80 per barrel.</p> <p>Chua said that the suspension of the implementation of fuel tax increase is not necessary at this time as the average cost of Dubai crude oil for the period September to December 2018 is US\$71 per barrel, resulting in the decrease in the retail prices of gas and diesel. Moreover, Chua reported that the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) projects that inflation rates will go down in 2019.</p> |
|  | HJRs 27 & 31 | Reps. Lagman and Go (M.) | Calling for the immediate suspension of the increases and scheduled increases in the excise taxes on fuel as imposed in Section 43 of RA 10963  |  |
|  | HJR 29       | Rep. Batocabe            | Suspending the excise tax on fuel   |  |
|  | HR 1838      | Rep. Alejano             | Calling for the immediate review of the implementation of RA 10963, and its impact on the way of life of Filipinos, specifically the poor, amidst the continued increase in inflation and prices of fuel in order to recommend for its continued implementation or suspension as well as to come up with policies that would cushion its negative impact against the poor |  |
|  | HR 1919      | Rep. Romero              | Urging President Rodrigo Roa Duterte to suspend from June 1 to August 31, 2018 the imposition of the excise tax on petroleum products provided in RA 10963  |  |

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| Continuation...<br>Ways and Means<br>(Technical Working Group) | HR 2253 | Rep. Alejano | Expressing support for the Department of Finance's (DOF) suspension of the scheduled hike in the fuel excise tax for 2019 and to exhort the same to include in the suspension the presently imposed fuel excise tax under the TRAIN Law with the goal of providing relief for the poor who has been adversely affected by such taxes and to fully realize the intention of the DOF to mitigate inflationary pressures on the country | Replying to questions from several members, Chua explained that the tax increase will lower the rate of inflation but only by a small fraction, while government will lose a huge amount of potential revenues. To illustrate, Chua cited BSP's projections wherein a six-month suspension of the fuel tax increase will lower the inflation rate by a mere 0.15% but will cost the government around P20.8 billion in revenue losses. |
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| AGENCY BRIEFINGS   |   |  |
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| COMMITTEE  | SUBJECT MATTER  | DISCUSSIONS  |
| Bicol Recovery and Economic Development<br>(Special Committee) | <p>Discussion on the plans and programs for Region V of the following government agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Civil Defense (OCD)</li> <li>• Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)</li> <li>• Philippine National Police (PNP)</li> </ul> | <p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Renato Unico Jr. (1<sup>st</sup> District, Camarines Norte), discussed with concerned government agencies their respective plans and programs for Region V.</p> <p>The Committee dispensed with the individual presentations of the resource persons to allow the lawmakers to ask questions or to raise their concerns over the status of projects in their districts.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Unico, OCD Region V Regional Director Claudio Yucot said that the OCD has endorsed the following projects for funding under the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (NDRRM) Fund: construction/improvement and disaster proofing of flood control infrastructure in Albay, P2.85 billion; and rehabilitation of various public infrastructures in Camarines Sur damaged by Typhoon Nina in 2016, P582 million. These projects were already issued a Special Allotment Release Order (SARO).</p> <p>DSWD Assistant Regional Director for Operations (ARDO) Arwin Razo informed the Committee that the Department is targeting over 191,000 indigent senior citizens as beneficiaries of its Emergency Shelter Assistance (ESA), a program which gives assistance in the reconstruction of shelters of typhoon survivors.</p> <p>Catanduanes Rep. Cesar Sarmiento suggested to DSWD to download the ESA funds to local government units (LGUs) to expeditiously implement the program. Razo explained that the DSWD has constraints in transferring additional funds to some LGUs with unliquidated cash advances.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Rep. Deogracias Ramos Jr. (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Sorsogon) inquired into the status of utilization of DSWD's Assistance to Individual in Crisis Situation (AICS).</p> <p>Razo said that as of December 2018, about 32,600 individuals in Region V were granted assistance under the AICS with a corresponding amount of P604 million. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> District of Sorsogon alone, about 1,308 beneficiaries were granted burial, education, medical, transportation and food assistance.</p> <p>Rep. Unico inquired about the directive of the President to deploy additional PNP troops in Bicol Region to ensure peace and order during the 2019 national elections, and whether the PNP has already identified the hotspots in the region.</p> <p>Police Senior Superintendent Jeffrey Fernandez said that the PNP Special Action Force (SAF) already deployed one company in Camarines Sur. He identified the provinces of Albay, Camarines Sur and Masbate as hotspots because of intense political rivalry and the presence of communist terrorists in these areas.</p> |

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| <p><i>Continuation...</i><br/>Bicol Recovery and Economic Development (Special Committee)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education (DepEd)</li> </ul>  | <p>Fernandez also reported that the PNP Region V has 27 on-going projects consisting of construction of police stations, nine of which will be inaugurated this month, while the rest will be inaugurated early next year. He noted that all of these projects are funded under the 2018 General Appropriations Act (GAA).</p> <p>With regard to reports that some DepEd Region V officials, personnel, and teachers are engaged in partisan politics, DepEd Region V Assistant Director Cristito Eco asserted that it will not be tolerated as it is violative of existing laws and Civil Service rules.</p> <p>Rep. Salvador Belaro Jr. (Party-List, 1-ANG EDUKASYON) criticized DepEd for its alleged policy prohibiting schools from inviting public officials as guest speakers during school occasions.</p> <p>Rep. Rodel Batocabe (Party-List, AKO BICOL) requested the DepEd Region V to provide temporary learning spaces while the DepEd is waiting for the budget for the construction of school buildings to be released.</p>   |
| <p>Senior Citizens (Special Committee)</p>  | <p>Briefing on programs and policies for senior citizens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)</li> <li>• National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) – Senior Citizens Sectoral Council</li> <li>• Federation of Senior Citizens Association of the Philippines (FSCAP)</li> <li>• Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. (COSE)</li> </ul> | <p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Imelda Marcos (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Ilocos Norte), listened to the briefing conducted by concerned government agencies and sectoral groups on their programs and policies for senior citizens.</p> <p>DSWD Social Welfare Officer Joana Foz apprised the Committee of the Department’s center-based and community-based programs and services for senior citizens.</p> <p>The center-based program, Foz said, involves the establishment of centers strategically located nationwide to serve as a venue for recreational, educational, health and social programs and activities for the senior citizens.</p> <p>The community-based program, Foz added, provides social pension to indigent senior citizens who are frail, sickly or with disability, without any pension from other government agencies, and without permanent source of income or financial assistance to support their basic needs. The program also ensures the protection of senior citizens from all forms of abuse through a reporting mechanism at the local levels called Reporting System and Prevention Program for Elder Abuse Cases (ReSPPEC).</p> <p>NAPC’s Office of Senior Citizens Affairs (OSCA) representative Salvacion Basciano said that NAPC intends to submit to the Committee several proposed measures aimed at further addressing the plight of senior citizens. Basciano added that OSCA works closely with the DSWD as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) in attending to the concerns of senior citizens. She also conveyed her appreciation to the House leadership over the creation of the Special Committee on Senior Citizens and expressed support to the bills that seek to expand the privileges and benefits granted to senior citizens.</p> <p>FSCAP Secretary General Oscar Ricaflanca said that FSCAP advocates for legislative measures that afford real protection to senior citizens, such as the anti-elder abuse law, creation of the National Commission of Senior Citizens, and Universal Social Pension bill.</p> <p>Senior Citizen Party-List Rep. and Committee Vice Chair Francisco Datol Jr. assured Ricaflanca that he has filed several bills in support of the advocacy of the FSCAP.</p> <p>COSE Project Coordinator Agustinus Koli presented the four main programs of COSE with the primary goal of ensuring the protection of senior citizens. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom from violence and abuse and inclusion in community-based programs;</li> <li>• Provision of livelihood and employment to guarantee income;</li> <li>• Provision of health services; and</li> <li>• Assistance during disasters and calamities.</li> </ul> |

| FORUM        |  |   |
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| COMMITTEE    | SUBJECT MATTER   | DISCUSSIONS   |
| Human Rights | Parliamentarian's Forum on Freedom of Religion or Belief | <p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Zambales), in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), conducted a forum on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) at the House of Representatives.</p> <p>The forum aims to raise awareness on the legal framework and legislations on FoRB in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia and explore ways in which legislators/parliamentarians can advocate and advance FoRB.</p> <p>Rep. Deloso-Montalla informed the forum participants of the recent passage of HB 8673 (Anti-Racial, Ethnic and Religious Discrimination Act) on third and final reading in the House last December 10, which is compliant with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Although there are no domestic laws yet that specifically prohibit discrimination based on religion, ethnicity or race, RA 11054 (Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), which was also recently enacted, strengthens the avenues for attaining genuine peace and freedom, including the free exercise of religion or belief, Rep. Montalla said.</p> <p>She also underscored the role of government in protecting the freedom of religion or belief, with the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) at the helm of this mandate.</p> <p>Meanwhile, NDI Asia Program Manager, Meghan Burland mentioned that the forum is part of NDI and APHR's FoRB program for Southeast Asia. Today's FoRB forum is the second so far, the first being that held in Jakarta, Indonesia last March, Burland added.</p> <p>International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Senior International Legal Adviser for Southeast Asia Emerlynne Gil discussed the importance of having a domestic legislation that would protect one's freedom of religion or belief. However, there are laws on religion in some countries which may be susceptible to abuse or violative of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and should therefore be repealed. He cited such laws as criminalizing blasphemy or defamation of religion.</p> <p>Myanmar Member of Parliament Nay Phone Latt and Malaysian State Assemblyman Ramakrishnan Suppiah discussed the legal framework and existing laws on FoRB, as well as the human rights situation and level of religious tolerance in their respective countries.</p> <p>On the other hand, Reps. Edcel Lagman (1<sup>st</sup> District, Albay), Maximo Rodriguez Jr. (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Cagayan de Oro City), and Kaka Bag-ao (Dinagat Islands) discussed the status of House Bills they filed seeking to address the challenges confronting freedom of religion or belief in the Philippines.</p> <p>An open forum followed after the presentations of the resource speakers.</p> <p>Ifugao Rep. Teddy Brawner Baguilat Jr. gave the closing remarks and thanked the guests and the resource persons for their participation. He gave the assurance that legislations that would further promote the freedom of religion or belief will be pursued in Congress.</p> |