

HON. ROSANNA "RIA" V. VERGARA

Chairperson
Committee on Social Services
House of Representatives
Quezon City

Dear **Representative VERGARA**,

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) supports **House Bill No. 6531** entitled, **"An Act Establishing the Volunteer Responders Incentives Protection Program Thereby Providing Financial and/or Non-Pecuniary Benefits Especially for Those Who Became Victims Themselves of Such Disasters, Calamities or Emergencies in the Course of Duty and for Other Purposes"** or the **"Volunteer Responders Incentives Protection Act of 2022"**, authored by Representative Gabriel H. Bordado, Jr., as it recognizes the spirit of *bayanihan* and the welfare of disaster responders.

Further, the provisions of this Act should be in accordance with existing national volunteer-related laws, rules and regulations, such as Republic Act (RA) No. 10121 or the *"Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010"*, RA 9418 or the *"Volunteer Act of 2007"*, and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) Memorandum Circular No. 64, s. 2021.

To further enhance the Bill, we recommend the following:

1. Volunteer Responders

- 1.1. To define *"Volunteer Responders"* in the Bill. As the term suggests, 'volunteers' should not have any financial or pecuniary benefit in rendering service;
- 1.2. To clarify the coverage of the Bill, e.g., the volunteer must be a member of a volunteer organization or not; and
- 1.3. To develop a mechanism for the enlistment of all Community Disaster Volunteers.

2. Benefits and Incentives

- 2.1. To define (1) *"Benefits and Incentives"*; (2) Non-Pecuniary Benefits, and (3) *"Volunteer Emergency, Calamity, or Disaster Services"*; and
- 2.2. Benefits and Incentives may include (1) per diem incentives/allowances, including food provision; (2) medical incentives, provision for booster shots, personal protective equipment, and medical coverage to all injuries or ailments contracted while on duty; (3) accidental injury, dismemberment, and death benefits; and (4) burial assistance for loss of life while on duty; and

- 2.3. To clarify that entitlement to other benefits shall be limited only to those volunteer responders who become victims and/or suffer injury or death while performing volunteer emergency, calamity, or disaster services.

3. Calamity

- 3.1. To define "Calamity" in the Bill.

4. Other Comments and Recommendations.

- 4.1. To provide for a Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). The IRR should include the creation of an Inter-Agency Committee headed or to be led by the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) of the Department of National Defense (DND) with members from other governmental agencies, such as DSWD, Department of Health (DOH), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and Department of Education (DepEd), and other stakeholders. Role delineation of each agency should be clearly stated for transparency and accountability;
- 4.2. To add a Section pertaining to the Powers and Functions of the OCD following Section 9 of Republic Act (RA) No. 1021 to ensure that all disaster risk reduction programs, projects and activities requiring regional and international support shall be in accordance with duly established national policies, and aligned with international agreements;
- 4.3. To add a Section creating an enabling environment for substantial and sustainable participation of civil society organizations, private groups, volunteers and communities, and to recognize their contributions in the government's disaster risk reduction efforts similar to that contained in RA 10121;
- 4.4. To add a Section on Appropriations where the amount necessary to carry out the implementation of this Act shall be sourced from the budget of the DND-OCD, and that thereafter such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual budget of the DND>
- 4.5. To provide titles for every Section, and to include the following Sections: (a) Appropriations; (b) Non-impairment Clause; (c) Repealing Clause; (d) Separability Clause; and (e) Effectivity Clause.

This is being submitted for the Chairperson's consideration.

Thank you.

Regards,


REX GATCHALIAN

Secretary

Date: 02/14/23