



15 April 2021

REPRESENTATIVE MARIA LOURDES ACOSTA-ALBA

Chair, Committee on Women & Gender Equality (CWGE)
House of Representatives
Quezon City

Dear Representative Acosta-Alba:

Greetings from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas!

We laud our 26 Representatives for coming together as fellow authors of the House Bill No. 9059, which is a perfect example of how important it is to reinforce gender-based legislation in Congress. We note that the proposed Gender Responsive and Inclusive Pandemic Management Act of 2021 will create programs and protocols that addresses the unique needs of women during disasters and public health emergencies.

As such, it also aims to enforce access to social protections and safety nets, involve women in the formulation of guidelines in the national management of the pandemic, ensures access to and the continuous functioning of gender desks and health services, and appropriate funds to secure these programs, among others.

We also commend the bill for its inclusiveness as it also takes into consideration the unique situation faced by our women migrant workers as it prescribes for a set of specific protective measures to protect them and their children.

Hence, we fully support the immediate passage of this vital piece of legislation as we sadly note that throughout the pandemic, women have faced challenges such as decreased economic opportunities, gender-based violence, inadequate access to justice and services, increased unpaid care work, labor-related issues, and compounded sexual and reproductive health risks.

With this measure, it will put engagement front and center as it would institutionalize women's participation in decision-making at every stage of the pandemic or emergency management. The bill will also compel gender-based violence services – especially temporary shelters, psychosocial services, and legal aid – to remain functional even during a public health emergency. It also mandates prepared response systems for sexual and reproductive health rights, as well as a gendered approach to vaccination which involves being non-discriminatory. The measure

would also make it mandatory to prioritize gender alongside disability, age, and other overlapping vulnerabilities in assessing targets for social protections.

Specifically, may we recommend the following inputs for the consideration of the Committee:

1. **Subsidy Program for Loans Incurred by Repatriated Migrants.** Under Section 14, we suggest that there should be a mention on developing a relief program for migrants who incurred loans for their migration processes who were later forced or opted to be repatriated due to health crises. This subsidy or relief program will help ease the financial constraints, specifically of women migrants who manage their households. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration of the Department of Labor and Employment may lead in crafting this program, in collaboration with either government or private financial or lending institutions.
2. **Lead Government Agency in Protecting Women Migrants and their Children.** While our Foreign Service Posts are mandated under Section 17 to ensure the protection of women migrant workers and their children, and that coordination among the mentioned government agencies¹ were clearly specified, there was no indication however as to which of these agencies will lead, especially in carrying out the protective measures that were laid under Section 18. We humbly suggest that the bill should explicitly assign the leadership of this crucial protection phase to the Department of Foreign Affairs, consistent with our One-Country Team approach overseas.
3. **Sex-Disaggregated Registry of Migrants.** A mandatory and updated registry of sex-disaggregated data (SDD) of migrants should be included as part of the protective measures under Section 18. The SDD registry of migrants is very vital in monitoring the welfare of women migrant workers while their mobility are limited by lockdown/quarantine measures by their host countries during health crises, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic.
4. **Online Registration of Births.** One of the challenges that surfaced during the COVID-19 Pandemic is the registration of births either locally or overseas. While a system has been in place for Civil Registration, the potential of Information and Communication Technology should be harnessed through development of an Online Registration of Birth. The inclusion of this system in the bill is important in averting newborns from facing possible exclusion from essential services, such as healthcare, among others.
5. **Designated and Exclusive Health Facility/Hospital for Women with Reproductive Concerns.** The bill may include an immediate identification by the Department of Health of designated hospital or health facility in every province or region that will accommodate only to women with reproductive health concerns. This will prevent them from exposure to other communicable diseases.

¹ IATF, IACVAWC, IACAT, SCIM, DFA, DOLE, and DSWD

6. ***Unhampered Accessibility of Young Girls to Education.*** One of the gender-related issues that young women are experiencing during the pandemic is their reduced educational access due to internet connectivity. To address this, the bill may include the development of a program that provides accessibility to education through a collaboration between the Department of Information and Communications Technology, Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Presidential Communications Operations Office. This will also facilitate a regular evaluation on their changing needs and plan for strategies to remove barriers to connectivity and expand access to education.

The CFO echoes the effort of the Committee for this bill's immediate passage as it reinforces women's role in battling the pandemic, as well as in confronting gender issues worsened by the health crisis. We hope that our recommendations be considered by the Committee towards a gender-based legislative measure that is responsive to the unique needs of women, especially during health crises, such as this ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

Thank you and should you have further clarification, your designated officer may contact Mr. Rodrigo Garcia, Jr. (rodrigovgarciajr@gmail.com) of our Policy, Planning and Research Division.

Best regards.

Very truly yours,


SECRETARY FRANCISCO P. ACOSTA
Chairperson 

