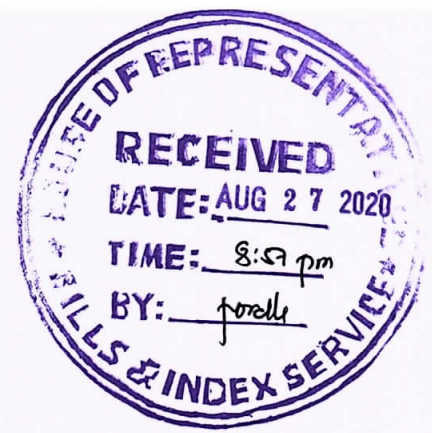


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. 7538



Introduced by the Honorable Precious Hipolito Castelo

EXPLANATORY NOTE

As of August 7, 2020, the Philippines has eclipsed Indonesia as the country to be the most affected by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Southeast Asia. This is despite imposing the longest, strictest lockdown in the region.¹ Variations of lockdowns has caused the Philippines to enter recession, as the country experienced the sharpest drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with 16.5% in the 2nd quarter of 2020.²

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), while the Philippines has improved its capability to test for COVID-19 as well as expand its treatment capacity, there is a big room for improvement when it comes to its contact tracing efforts. Dr. Rabindra Abeyasinghe of WHO said that the increasing positivity rate shows that there is a "continuing transmission" of COVID-19 in the country.

Contact tracing is the process of finding out who has recently been in close contact with a person who has tested positive with a virus, such as SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and reaching out to those people to let them know that they may have been exposed to an infected individual. This way, the traced contact will be guided on what to do next, which may include self-isolation to prevent further spread of the virus.

Dr. Gregory Poland, an infectious disease expert, says that contact tracing is one of the most important aspects in the fight against COVID-19. He says that contact tracing is a "time-tested public health strategy" in battling against infectious diseases as it was used before during the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the SARS outbreak in 2003.³

It is thus the intent of this bill to establish contact tracing centers in COVID-19 high-risk areas, to be determined by the Department of Health. Through this, there must be a system that shall be efficient in monitoring the health status of those infected with COVID-19 as well as the traced contacts. If contact tracing efforts will be done quickly and effectively, the impact of the pandemic will dramatically decrease.

The immediate passage of this bill is most earnestly sought.


PRECIOUS HIPOLITO CASTELO

¹ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/08/07/asia-pacific/philippines-coronavirus-southeast-asia/>

² <https://rappler.com/business/gross-domestic-product-philippines-q2-2020>

³ <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/what-is-contact-tracing-and-why-is-it-important-in-fight-against-covid-19/>

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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING CONTACT TRACING CENTERS IN COVID-19 HIGH-RISK AREAS
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 "COVID-19 Contact Tracing Centers Act of 2020".

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health and other social services available to all people at affordable cost. Towards this end, the State shall protect the interest and promote the well-being and medical needs of the Filipino people by establishing Contact Tracing Centers (CTCs) in COVID-19 high risk areas to properly isolate and treat people whenever necessary.

SEC 3. *COVID-19 Contact Tracing Centers.* – To carry out the above policy, contact tracing centers shall be established in COVID-19 high-risk areas.

SEC. 4. *High-Risk Areas.* – The determination of high-risk areas shall be made by the Department of Health (DOH). It shall be based on a standard metric which shall be set by the DOH. Local government units, through their local chief executives, may recommend that a barangay, city, municipality or province be declared as a high-risk area.

SEC. 5. *Functions.* – CTCs shall ensure that all individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 shall be interviewed for as many contacts as possible, with priority to close contacts. It shall also ensure that all traced contacts are monitored for symptoms and, where necessary, tested and treated.

SEC. 6. *Leadership.* – CTCs shall be headed by an Executive Director who shall be a medical doctor.

SEC. 7. *Appropriations.* – The Secretary of Health shall immediately incorporate in the Department's programs the operationalization of the CTCs, the funding of which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 8. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, DOH shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 9. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 10. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with, the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

SEC. 11. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,