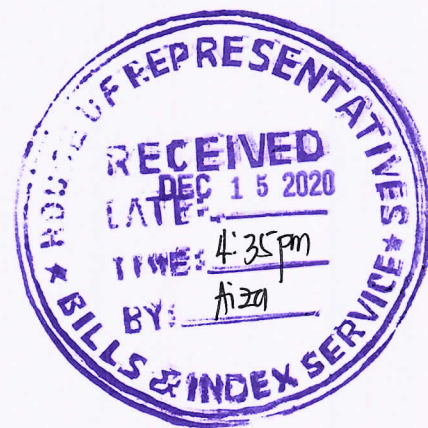


Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives

Quezon City, Metro Manila

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **8258**



INTRODUCED BY
REP. ALFRED VARGAS

AN ACT
EXPANDING THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR TROPICAL MEDICINE,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In 1981, by virtue of Executive Order No. 674, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) was established, intended to be the prime biomedical research institute for the control of communicable diseases in the country. It was created to fulfill its primary functions of conducting research for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of tropical diseases present in public health. It is also the duty of the institution to create vaccines to control diseases that can be easily prevented through vaccinations. Other general functions include the development of cost-effective strategies for the control of infectious/ tropical diseases and provide disease control-training courses to medical practitioners.¹

The RITM is also the institution designated to be the National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for dengue, influenza, enteroviruses, measles and other viral exanthems; tuberculosis and other mycobacteria; bacterial enteric diseases antimicrobial resistance; mycology; emerging diseases; malaria and other parasites for confirmatory testing of blood units.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Philippines, the government expanded the testing capacity of the only research institute for Tropical Medicine to 23 licensed testing labs spread across the country.² Even with expansion, these support centers were very limited and the manpower was

¹ Research Institute For Tropical Medicine (n.d) Mandate, Function, and Quality Policy. <http://ritm.gov.ph/transparency/functions/> (Accessed on 23 November 2020)

² World Health Organization (2020) 100 days of COVID-19 in the Philippines: How WHO supported the Philippine Response. <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/feature-stories/detail/100-days-of-covid-19-in-the-philippines-how-who-supported-the-philippine-response> (Assessed on 23 November 2020)

not enough to perform COVID-19 tests, and so operations were severely challenged. This pressure to keep up has long been built from a series of pandemics that the country has faced in the past, such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS-CoV), and now, the corona virus disease (COVID-19).

As the coronavirus continues to persist, it was made apparent that this four-decade-old Executive Order faces difficulties in addressing this new wave of pandemic. Our capacity to cope with procedures and large-scale operations have been arduous because this important health institution demands essential reforms.

For it is the duty of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them, the government must recognize the need to expand the capacity of the RITM to better assist the greater public and control any pandemic.

This bill seeks to establish RITM regional branches in key population centers of the country such as Cebu and Davao. As the only public research hospital that specializes in communicable diseases, the RITM must take a more proactive role in providing scientific and research-based disease treatment and control protocols, and a detailed information dissemination plan to local government units and other national agencies. This bill also serves as a counterpart legislation for Senate Bill No. 1407 filed by Senator Joel Villanueva.

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



ALFRED VARGAS

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REP. ALFRED VARGAS**

**AN ACT
EXPANDING THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR TROPICAL MEDICINE,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

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 "Expanding the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) Act."

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is the policy of the State to promote the health and well-being of its citizens. Given that communicable diseases constitute most of the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the country, the State prioritizes national development in the field of health and shall endeavor to create a strong biological research component necessary for the effective pursuit of programs for the control of communicable diseases.

SECTION 3. The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine. - There is hereby created a Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) that will provide the biomedical research support and treatment for communicable disease control program in the Philippines to be established in Metro Manila.

SECTION 4. RITM Regional Centers. - There shall be established RITM Regional Centers in places with key vulnerable populations as may be determined by its Advisory Board.

SECTION 5. Scope and Coverage. - For purposes of this Act, the scope and coverage of tropical medicine shall pertain to diseases that are specific to the tropics, which is the geographical area between the tropic of Cancer and the tropic of Capricorn, and for diseases that present differently in this geographical region as compared to other regions, whether it originated or

has been transmitted to the country, to wit: corona virus disease (COVID-19), Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS CoV), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), ebola virus, influenza A virus subtype (H1N1), gastrointestinal infections, viral hepatitis, bacterial and nonbacterial respiratory infections, amoebiasis, schistosomiasis, filariasis, malaria, pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, meningitis, meningismus, measles, mumps, herpes, chicken pox, rocky mountain spotted fever, encephalitis, echo-viral diseases, coxsackie-viral diseases, and Philippine hemorrhagic fever: Provided, That the Secretary of the Department of Health (DOH) may include such other pertinent diseases in consultation with the Advisory Board herein created.

SECTION 6. Organization. - The RITM shall be directly under the control and supervision of the Department of Health (DOH). It shall be headed by a Director who shall be assisted by an Assistant Director, to be appointed by the Secretary of Health. The Director shall be responsible for the implementation of policies and the immediate management of the programs and operations of the Institute.

It shall also have technical and administrative support staff as well as consultants, as may be necessary. Such consultants may be drawn from the private sector on consultancy or contractual basis and shall be granted honoraria or allowances at such amounts as may be determined in accordance with existing rules and regulations.

It may also call upon experts in the public sector in the performance of its mandate.

SECTION 7. Advisory Board. - The RITM shall have an Advisory Board composed of the following: Formulate the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Roadmap;

- a) The Secretary of Health as the Chairman;
- b) The Executive Director of the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD) as Member; and
- c) A designated representative from the Philippine Medical Association (PMA) as Member.

SECTION 8. Powers and Functions. - The RITM shall have the following powers and functions:

- a) Undertake research activities in the diagnosis, control, and prevention of tropical diseases that are major causes of mortality and morbidity in the Philippines;
- b) Conduct clinical trials aimed at better understanding and control of tropical disease;

- c) Conduct regular training courses for medical and paramedical personnel in the control of common tropical diseases in the country;
- d) Provide high quality tertiary care and treatment to both inpatients and out-patients suffering from tropical diseases included within the scope of RITM's research activities;
- e) Arrange for the participation of the PCHRD and the PMA in the planning and implementation of the programs of RITM;
- f) Apply for, receive, and accept bequests, grants, and donation of funds, equipment, materials and services needed for the attainment of its objectives; and
- g) Perform such other related activities as may be assigned by the Secretary of Health.

SECTION 9. *Authority to Use Income.* - The RITM shall be authorized to generate its income and use the same pursuant to its mandate under this Act.

SECTION 10. *Appropriations.* - The amount necessary to implement the provisions of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SECTION 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* - The Department of Health (DOH), together with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), and the Philippine Medical Association (PMA), shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations within sixty (60) days upon the effectivity of this Act.

SECTION 12. *Separability Clause.* - If for any reason any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, such parts or portions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 13. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees, presidential proclamations, letters of instruction, rules and regulations or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 14. *Effectivity.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette and in at least two (2) newspapers of general Circulation.

Approved,