

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3147



Introduced by Representative Ambrosio “Boy” C. Cruz, Jr.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

During the first State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., he enumerated 19 pieces of legislation that the current administration will be advocating for passage in the Nineteenth (19th) Congress. Among those enumerated is the creation of a Philippine Virology Institute.

The creation of a Virology Institute in the Philippines is not only in response to the SARS-CoV-2, but is also a measure intended to protect the Filipino people for years to come from viral diseases affecting humans, plants, and animals. While it is true that the novel coronavirus exposed the weakness of virology research in the country, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) was not remiss in coming to the forefront of the country’s efforts to combat the virus. The DOST, along with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) have called for the strengthening of the research and development capacity of the country through the creation of a Philippine Virology Institute devoted to the study, inquiry, analysis, review, investigation, and evaluation of human, plant, and animal viruses.

In the Philippines, the Department of Health (DOH) has recorded a total number of 3,764,364 COVID-19 cases, with 29,897 active cases, 3,6673,745 recoveries, and 60,704 deaths.¹ Aside from the continued threat of the COVID-19 virus, there now looms another infectious disease on humans caused by the monkeypox virus.

Since the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in the Philippines in 2019, data

¹ DOH Covid-19 Tracker, as of July 28, 2022

from the Department of Agriculture (DA) shows that as of March 31, 2022, the incidence of the ASF has waned, in that the disease is now found only in two (2) regions, four (4) provinces, seven (7) municipalities, and twenty (20) barangays.

Plants and crops are not spared, as viruses and viral infections such as Rice Tungro, Papaya Ringspot, Banana and Abaca Bunchy Top, and Tomato and Squash Mosaic and Leaf Curl affect crop production.

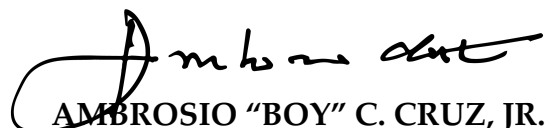
The foregoing viral infections and threats of infection show that viruses do not choose their victims, but they continue to evolve and can affect not only a singular species. The repercussions of such viral diseases is felt in the life of the simple Filipino citizen and the larger economy as a whole.

The creation of a Virology Institute of the Philippines (VIP) is sought to provide scientific and technology-based research, development, and experimentation towards strengthening the country's capacity to address existing, evolving, and subsequent viruses, viral diseases, and viral infections. At times when there is no solution offered by the international community, there must be utilization of local resources, talents, and expertise. To this end, ample attention and importance must be given to medically and scientifically sound, indigenous, homegrown, and native solutions, cures, remedies, and medication. A Virology Institute devoted to these ends shall substantially enhance and equip the government in its fight against viral diseases.

President Marcos concluded his SONA by stating, "We will endure." Indeed, the Filipino people will not only endure, but they will thrive with a government that is equipped with current information, state-of-the-art laboratories and apparatus, manned by competent experts.

This same measure was already approved on the third and final reading by the House of Representatives in the last Congress but was not approved by the Senate for lack of material time before the adjournment of Congress.

Considering the foregoing, the approval of this Bill is earnestly sought.


AMBROSIO "BOY" C. CRUZ, JR.
Representative, Fifth District of
Bulacan

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**AN ACT CREATING THE VIROLOGY INSTITUTE OF THE PHILIPPINES AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Section 1. Short Title – This Act shall be known as the “Virology Institute of the Philippines Act of 2022.”

Section 2. Declaration of Policy – It is hereby the declared policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people, instill health consciousness among them and improve the quality of life of every Filipino through empowering and enabling local research efforts, and endeavors, advancements, and developments.

It is the further declared policy of the State to institute scientifically-backed and research-based policies designed to address the current state of human, plant, and animal virology in the country.

In line with this, the State recognizes the importance of the establishment of a virology and vaccine research and development institute that is at par with international standards to address present and future, expected and unexpected, viral diseases affecting humans, plants, and animals.

Section 3. Creation of the Virology Institute of the Philippines. – To carry out the above-stated policy, the Virology Institute of the Philippines, hereinafter referred to

as the VIP, is hereby created and established. The VIP shall be attached to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) for purposes of policy and program coordination, to ensure alignment with national policies and priorities.

Section 4. Objectives. – The objectives of the VIP are the following:

- a) To promote science and technology research and development in the field of virus biology;
- b) To develop locally-made and curated diagnostic kits, vaccines, and therapeutics to address human, plant, and animal diseases;
- c) To operate and develop a virology knowledge domain and database;
- d) To establish and operate an in-house virus gene bank, virus genome laboratory, and virus reference laboratory;
- e) To organize appropriate channels and access to information and research and development studies and results to the public;
- f) To provide recommendatory actions to the proper decision-making authority;
- g) To act as a consultative body on all matters relative to virology and the development of vaccines; and
- h) To ensure that all actions undertaken according to this Act shall be in pursuit of the protection, promotion, and improvement of the well-being of the Filipino people.

Section 5. Powers and Functions of the VIP. – To fulfill the foregoing declared policies and objectives, the VIP shall have the following powers and functions:

- a) Act as the primary research institute that will spearhead the inception and materialization of a national virology research plan, in coordination and consultation with relevant public and private sectors;
- b) Undertake research and development innovations that directly address the current state of existing and emerging viruses and infectious diseases;
- c) Formulate policies, programs, and projects aimed at promoting virology

research and vaccine development;

- d) Coordinate with appropriate local and international bodies in forming effective diagnostic strategies;
- e) Assume the responsibility of operating, managing, and, maintaining a virology research center, laboratory, and database;
- f) Establish a central experiment station and such number of regional experiment stations in relevant geographical areas within the country as may be material to the spread of infectious diseases;
- g) Streamline the dissemination of research studies and results to the public; and
- h) Support efforts towards the training of Filipino virology experts and local researchers.

Section 6. Organizational Structure of the VIP. – The VIP shall be headed by a Virology Commissioner, who shall also act as the Chairman of the VIP. The Virology Commissioner shall be assisted by two (2) Deputy Virology Commissioners, one to be responsible for Virology Research and one to be responsible for Vaccine Development. The Virology Commissioner and the two (2) Deputy Virology Commissioners shall be appointed by the President of the Philippines for a term of three (3) years and may be reappointed for another term of three (3) years. Vacancies in the VIP shall be filled in the same manner in which the original appointment was made.

The Virology Commissioner must be at least thirty-five (35) years of age and of good moral character, unquestionable integrity, and known probity, and possess a Bachelor's degree in the field of microbiology and a postgraduate degree in Virology, with at least three (3) years relevant experience in the field of virology.

Section 7. Quarterly Reports. - The Virology Commissioner, or in his absence or inability, either of the Deputy Virology Commissioners, shall render a comprehensive quarterly report to the President of the Philippines and the Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, or as frequently as may be determined by the President or the Secretary.

Section 8. Inter-Agency Cooperation. – The VIP shall coordinate with the following departments, agencies, and sectors for the effective enforcement of this Act:

- (a) The Department of Science and Technology (DOST);
- (b) The Department of Health (DOH);
- (c) The Department of Agriculture (DA);
- (d) The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR);
- (e) The Department of Finance (DOF);
- (f) The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI);
- (g) The Food and Drug Administration (FDA);
- (h) The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM);
- (i) The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA);
- (j) The Bureau of Immigration (BI);
- (k) The University of the Philippines National Institute of Health (NIH);
- (l) The Commission on Higher Education (CHED);
- (m) The National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST);
- (n) The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH);
- (o) The National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP);
- (p) The Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC); and
- (q) Other relevant government agencies.

Section 9. Transfer of Units, Offices, and Functions. – Components of the DOST devoted to viral disease research shall hereafter be transferred to appropriate divisions within the VIP.

Section 10. Application of the Balik Scientist Program (BSP). – In accordance with Republic Act. No. 11035, or the “Balik Scientist Act”, science, technology or innovation experts, such as scientists, professionals, educators, technicians, researchers, engineers, innovators, technologists, technology entrepreneurs or any person with special skills or expertise, qualified under the said law, shall be given preference in the engagement of VIP staff and consultants, subject to the application of relevant laws, rules, and regulations.

Section 11. Engagement of Foreign Science, Technology, or Innovation Experts. –

The VIP may engage the services of science, technology, or innovation foreign experts whenever there are no available and qualified Filipino experts for the job, *Provided, however*, in times of declared national emergency, the VIP is authorized to directly engage the services of foreign experts, *Provided, further*, that such engagement shall be for short-term assignments not exceeding three (3) months, renewable for another three (3) months, *Provided, finally*, that such services may be terminated by the VIP at any time upon the determination of the cessation of the cause requiring the engagement of such foreign expert. Such foreign expert shall be issued a valid Special Work Permit by the Bureau of Immigration before the performance of any task for the VIP.

Section 12. Coordination with International Bodies. – To address pressing health emergencies caused by viral diseases, the VIP shall engage in discourse and multilateral agreements with international organizations to coordinate the swift and efficient delivery of vaccine supply, virology research findings and results, and identification of potential pathogens.

Section 13. Local Solutions. – The VIP shall support, reinforce, and give importance to the research efforts and technological developments centered on innovative and homegrown solutions. To this end, the VIP shall develop a system by which local researchers, scientists, and experts can directly propose their studies to the VIP and be granted logistic support.

Section 14. Colloquy, Education, and Promotion. – The VIP shall draft guidelines for the promotion of discussions, symposiums, conferences, and dialogues for inclusive and unabridged access by the public to information available to the government through the VIP, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law.

The VIP shall facilitate the recruitment, training, compensation, and the terms and conditions of training programs for local Filipino students, scientists and experts, in consultation and coordination with CHED, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), and Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs), and other relevant institutions of learning. In line with this, the VIP, in coordination with the DOST, shall endeavor to maximize the dissemination of its objectives and mandates.

Section 15. Official Site of the VIP. – A lot with an area equivalent to at least five (5) hectares under the administration of the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) within the New Clark Economic Zone in Tarlac Province shall be allocated exclusively to the VIP, its research facilities, and laboratories. The biosafety infrastructure shall be designed based on risk assessment for handling specific pathogens following the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on the establishment of a

virology laboratory in developing countries.

Section 16. Entitlement to Magna Carta Benefits. – All employees and personnel of the VIP shall be entitled to the benefits granted under Republic Act No. 8439, or the “Magna Carta for Scientists, Engineers, Researchers, and Other Science and Technology Personnel in Government”.

Section 17. Appropriations. – The DOST Secretary shall include the implementation of this Act in the DOST’s programs. The amounts necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the General Appropriations Act.

Section 18. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within 100 days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOST shall promulgate the necessary guidelines for the effective implementation of this Act.

Section 19. Separability Clause. – If for any reason, any part or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 20. Repealing Clause. – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 21. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect 15 days following the completion of its publication in the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,