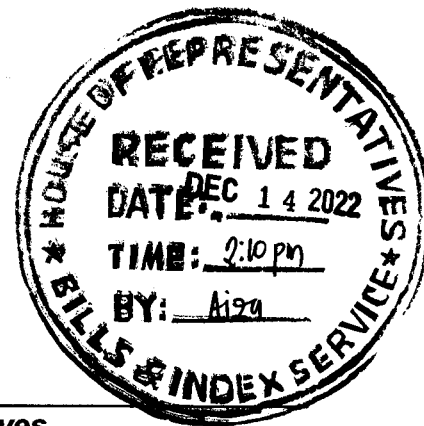


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 6684



Introduced by Rep. Ray Florence T. Reyes

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Established in 1981 by way of Executive Order No. 674, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) serves as the main research arm of the Department of Health for the prevention and control of infectious and tropical diseases. In 1998, the production of biologicals and vaccines was added to its mandate, and in 2000, the RITM was designated as the National Research Laboratory for a number of communicable diseases that may present itself differently in tropical countries, and the confirmatory testing site for blood units.

On January 30, 2020, the same day that the Philippines recorded its first confirmed case of COVID19 in the country, the World Health Organization (WHO) activated its highest level of alert by declaring the COVID19 pandemic a public health emergency of international concern. The Philippines then mounted a multi-sectoral whole of nation approach in trying to limit the spread of the disease.

Due to its mandate of undertaking research in the prevention and treatment of tropical diseases and the production of vaccines, the RITM became the primary testing and confirmatory laboratory for the disease. However, an article published on March 20, 2020 stated that the Philippines has only processed over 1,000 patient samples for COVID19; 1,000 samples twelve days after a State of Public Emergency was declared in the country.

Despite strict community quarantine protocols aimed at curbing the spread of COVID19 within the population and Department of Health guidelines wherein only "persons under investigation", or persons who show severe symptoms of the disease, senior citizens, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised were to be tested for the disease, the RITM, with only a daily capacity to process 300-450 swabs, was overwhelmed with samples coming from the regions because of the increasing number of people exhibiting symptoms. This led to huge backlogs in the processing and release of test results. What would usually take 48 hours to release

was taking 5-7 days. The Philippine healthcare system during that time was challenged by the lack of kits and laboratories for testing.

While we hope that a public health emergency with the same magnitude of COVID19 will never again sweep the world, it is the duty of the State to ensure that the health and safety of its people and to prepare for what scientists fear is inevitable. Establishing fully-capacitated and equipped regional branches of the RITM would provide more agility in government response, faster interventions and would spread the workload in the detection and prevention of diseases. This is a far cry from the existing one central institution processing samples from the entire archipelago.

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


RAY FLORENCE REYES
Representative, AnaKalusugan Partylist


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

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 ***“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. Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) Regional Centers. – There shall be established, under the supervision of the Department of Health (DOH), Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) Regional Centers in places with key vulnerable populations as may be determined by its Advisory Board.

SECTION 4. Organization. – The organizational structure and staffing pattern of the RITM Regional Centers shall be determined by the RITM Advisory Board in accordance with existing rules and regulations of the Civil Service Commission and the Organization, Position Classification and Compensation Bureau of the Department of Budget and Management.

In accordance with existing laws, rules and regulations, the Board may reorganize the structure, modify the staffing pattern and create and abolish divisions, sections on units in the RITM Regional Centers.

SECTION 5. Powers and Functions – The RITM Regional Centers shall maintain its two-fold primary functions of undertaking research in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of tropical diseases of public health importance as well as producing vaccines for the control of vaccine-preventable diseases.

In general, the functions of the RITM Regional Centers shall be as follows:

- 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) Develop cost effective strategies for the control of infectious/tropical diseases;
- c) Conduct clinical trials aimed at better understanding and control of tropical disease;
- d) Conduct regular training courses for medical and paramedical personnel in the control of common tropical diseases in the country;
- e) 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;
- f) Arrange for the participation of the PCHRD and the PMA in the planning and implementation of the programs of RITM;
- g) Apply for, receive, and accept bequests, grants, and donation of funds, equipment, materials and services needed for the attainment of its objectives; and
- h) Perform such other related activities as may be assigned by the Secretary of Health or as may be provided by law consistent with the purposes of the Institute.

SECTION 6. Appropriations. – The amount necessary to implement the provisions of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SECTION 7. 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 effectivity of this Act.

SECTION 8. 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 9. *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 10. *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,