



AN ACT PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WHO ARE DECLARED CONFIRMED, SUSPECTED, PROBABLE, AND RECOVERED CASES OF COVID-19, INCLUDING HEALTH WORKERS, OTHER FRONT LINERS, SERVICE WORKERS, REPATRIATED OFWs, RETURNING OFs AND LOCALLY STRANDED INDIVIDUALS (LSIs), AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF (BILL NO. 65)

Comments

1. On June 2, 2020, HB 6817 or the COVID-19 Related Anti-Discrimination Bill was approved on its third reading in the House of Congress. The last news reported on this bill was on June 3, 2020 where it states that the Senate version of the bill is still pending at the committee level.^[1] No further news on this bill was reported from thereon.

The cases of discrimination with COVID 19 patients and frontliners were rampant in 2020, hence the need for the bill. However, reported cases declined in 2021 which can probably be attributed to the “social media appeals” from COVID-19 frontliners as people become more aware and informed of the COVID-19 situation.^[2]

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that discrimination is still happening. Some LGUs, mostly in Metro Manila, already ordered ordinances on discrimination against COVID-19 patients and frontliners last 2020. Up to date, no such ordinance is issued in the BARMM region known by the commentator. In the explanatory note, it may best to include more recent cases of discrimination.

2. In Bangsamoro Bill No. 65, any person who commits any of the prohibited acts must pay a fine of Php5,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding 6 months or both.

In HB No. 6817, the amount of penalty varies on the discriminatory practices committed. A person shall be penalized by imprisonment of not less than 1 year but not more than 10 years, or a fine of not less than Php200,000.00 but not more than Php1,000,000.00 for harassment or assault. A person shall be penalized by imprisonment of not less than 6 months but not more than 5 years or a fine of not less than Php 50,000.00 but not more than Php500,000.00 or both for failure to give assistance, stigmatization, and unlawful refusal to honor valid and existing contracts.

Question: To what extent the Bangsamoro, as an autonomous region, can impose penalties and imprisonment?

3. In Section 4, would it be better to classify the discriminatory acts similar to HB No. 6817 to make it clearer? This could help clarify to what extent an act can be considered as a violation in this bill.

^[1] See [House approves COVID-19 related anti-discrimination bill on third reading \(cnnphilippines.com\)](https://cnnphilippines.com)

^[2] A study suggests that a personal appeal from an emergency physician, asking for public’s help based on something they’ve experienced, carries more weight with a



general audience than an appeal from a federal official that says the same thing in an impersonal way ([From the Heart: Study Shows Impact of Social Media Appeals from COVID-19 Frontliners \(uofmhealth.org\)](#)). The social media appeals from the frontliners have helped spread COVID 19 information to the public. Wrong information is one of the root causes of health-related discrimination.