

## Pandemic Governance: Responses for COVID-19 Management of Zamboanga City



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**ABSTRACT:** The challenges brought by pandemic governance include the efficient management of socioeconomic, political, and health issues. In today's sociodemographic and globalized environment, a rational and scientific approach to pandemic governance and public health policy formulation necessitates a combination of science, culture, and people. Effective pandemic governance requires an approach that is adaptive, and lesson based. In instances when faith in governmental institutions and political leadership are crucial, knowledge of the public health system, epidemiology, and socio-political issues is also important. Effective pandemic governance can impact COVID-19 management outcomes. This study looks into the Zamboanga City's COVID-19 management responses. It examines the effectiveness of the measures implemented by Zamboanga City in the critical areas specified for the management of the COVID-19 epidemic. This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method using secondary data analysis and interview guide. This study demonstrates that Zamboanga City's approaches to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic are effective in thirteen (13) assessment categories. This study also reveals flaws in the application of countermeasures against the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Thus, there is a need to improve responses on the part of political leaders by designing, integrating, and implementing sound governance strategies in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** Pandemic governance, COVID-19 management, efficiency, responses, measures

### I. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of COVID-19 has a significant impact on all nations and peoples on earth. According to Worldometer (2022), two hundred twenty-eight (228) nations and territories have reported a total of six hundred seventeen million three hundred seventy-three thousand nine hundred eighty-seven (617,373,987) confirmed COVID-19 cases, with a total death of six million five hundred thirty-one thousand one hundred sixty-nine (6,531,169). It has affected people from all walks of life and in every facet of it. Incalculable is the devastation that the pandemic has caused to humanity. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the pandemic has caused a great amount of lost particularly human lives worldwide and also constituted a threat to the public health, food, and labor. WHO said that the pandemic has created devastating socio-economic disruptions: millions of people around the world are in danger of going into extreme poverty, and the current estimate of about six hundred ninety million (690,000,000) undernourished individuals might increase by up to one hundred thirty-two million (132,000,000) by the end of the year.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected almost all countries in the world and more than fifty million (50,000,000) people around the world. It places the governments of the world in a state of uncertainty, which forces them to make difficult trade-offs considering the health and socio-economic challenges the pandemic raises. In the same year, more than half of the population of the was subjected to a strong quarantine lockdown. More than the health and socio-economic debacle that the COVID-19 has brought, it is now recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated the worst socio-economic crisis since Second World War. The crisis of COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented long-term effects on all aspects of life.

In this time of pandemic crisis, the public sector must be able to manage the uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation. Also, it must attempt to find solutions to problems under pressure and with lack of understanding as to the cause and effect. With that, there is a need to improve responses on the part of political leaders by designing, integrating, and implementing sound governance strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to derail even plans that are best laid because of its unprecedented characteristics and divergent requisites for its resolution, despite how the governments of the world forecast it.

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Consequently, these governments face several significant constraints in pandemic governance including the uncertainty of the consequences perceived by their citizens.

Like most of the countries in the world, Philippines has not been spared from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the lives of the Filipinos. With the entry of the virus in Philippine borders and the apprehension of the Filipinos on the possibility of its spread to other parts of the country, President Rodrigo R. Duterte, through Proclamation No. 922, declared a state of public health emergency throughout the country. This is in response to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in the country and the need for “whole-of-government and whole-of-nation” approach to the situation. This is to enable the government agencies and local government units (LGUs) promptly take action to prevent loss of life, utilize suitable resources to implement urgent and crucial measures to contain or prevent the spread of COVID-19, mitigate its effect and impact on the community, and prevent significant disruption of government and community operations.

Despite the various government interventions, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases increased exponentially. This led to President Duterte’s the declaration of state of calamity throughout the country through Proclamation No. 929, series of 2020. This declaration affords the National Government, along with Local Government Units (LGUs), significant flexibility to deploy the necessary monies, such as the Quick Response Fund, in their efforts to prepare for and respond to disasters, namely in containing the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring the provision of essential services to the afflicted population.

In order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 across the country, the national government formed the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID). With this, regional and local COVID-19 Task Forces were also established to manage the transmission of COVID-19 throughout the country. In addition to the efforts of the national government in extending help to the different regions in the country, the regional LGUs have adopted relevant executive orders and ordinances to prohibit the entry and limit the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 in the regions. The regional LGUs suspended classes in all levels and mass gatherings in any form, restricted land, air, and sea travels, and proclaimed community quarantine in their respective areas of responsibility (AOR), among other measures.

In an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Zamboanga Peninsula, different measures have been adopted by the LGUs in the region. These include, but are not limited to proclamation of community quarantines, closure of borders and restriction of movements. During the enforcement of community quarantines in the region, LGUs took the initiative of alleviating the deplorable plight of their people who have been affected by the measures put by their respective LGUs. To manage the spread of COVID-19 in Zamboanga City, Mayor Maria Isabelle G. Climaco promulgated the following executive orders: (1) Executive Order No. BC 552-2020: An Act Strengthening the Precautionary Measures to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 in Zamboanga City; (2) Executive Order No. BC 553-2020: An Act Declaring an Enhanced Community Quarantine in Zamboanga City for the Impending Spread of COVID-19, effective March 20, 2020; (3) Executive Order No. BC 558-2020: Act strengthening the declaration of an Enhanced Community Quarantine effective March 24, 2020; and (4) Memorandum dated April 12, 2020 extending ECQ in Zamboanga City until further notice. The IATF approved the extension of Zamboanga City's ECQ status from May 1, 2020, to May 15, 2020. On May 16, 2020, Zamboanga City was placed under General Community Quarantine.

As reported by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Region IX, the responses of the City Government of Zamboanga in the management of COVID-19 pandemic during the implementation of the community quarantine in the city include the following, to wit: (1) establishments providing basic necessities will remain open and such activities related to food and medicine production, i.e., public markets, supermarkets, groceries, convenience stores, bakeries, hospitals, medical clinics, pharmacies and drug stores, food preparation and delivery services, water -refilling stations, manufacturing and processing plants of basic food products and medicines, agricultural and fishery products and ancillary inputs, banks, money transfer services, power, energy, fuel, water and telecommunications supplies and facilities shall be open; (2) classes and school activities in all levels will remain suspended; (3) mass gatherings shall be prohibited; (4) religious gatherings shall be suspended; (5) a work from home arrangement shall be implemented except the PNP, AFP, health and emergency frontline services, border control, financial institutions, power/water/telecom utilities and other critical services; (6) a strict home quarantine shall be observed in all households; movement shall be limited to accessing basic necessities; and there will be heightened presence of uniform personnel to enforce quarantine procedures. For this objective, only a maximum of two (2) individuals per household will be permitted to depart from their residences. Barangay officials will be instructed to oversee adherence to this regulation, while ensuring that funeral services are accessible. It is recommended to bury the deceased immediately. The transportation of goods to and from Zamboanga City should not be obstructed. A curfew will be in effect throughout the entire city from 9 PM to 5 AM. Uniformed personnel, government officials, and members of the TF Covid-19 who are on official business, particularly those transporting medical supplies, COVID-19-related laboratory specimens, and other humanitarian aid, are permitted to travel by land, air, and sea. Individuals will produce valid identification documents at the checkpoints.

### **II. METHOD**

This study utilized descriptive-qualitative method with the use of secondary data analysis and interview guide in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. For secondary data analysis, this study utilized the data from the offices of the National Economic Development Authority Region IX (NEDA-IX), the Department of Interior and Local Government Region IX (DILG-IX), the Department of Labor and Employment Region IX (DILG-IX), the Department of Health Region IX (DOH-IX), the Police Regional Office IX (PRO-IX), online data from the Official Gazette, and the official webpage of the City Government of Zamboanga. For the interview guide, key officials of the City Government of Zamboanga were interviewed.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

As the government has been facing the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and its asymmetrical results in health, social, economic, and fiscal conditions to national and local governments, good governance is essential for managing the transmission of COVID-19 and mitigating its health, social, economic and fiscal effects in impacted communities. It is the responsibility of the government to establish a balance between health protection and socio-economic disruptions.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of the systemic nature of the crises that world is facing today, as well as the devastating effects these crises can have on the world's societies and economies. These crises unfold in a fragmented institutional context, leaving national governments with less strategies to address the crisis and involve different stakeholders, including the private sector, local governments, and civil society (OECD, 2020). Managing these crises and addressing their socioeconomic repercussions necessitate bold policy actions to ensure the resiliency of healthcare systems, the continuity of education, the preservation of businesses and jobs, and the stability of financial markets. Political leadership at the forefront of these crises is necessary to maintain the complex socio-economic and political balance of implementing measures to contain and reduce the impact of the pandemic while maintaining essential services. That kind of leadership is necessary to maintain the trust of the citizens in their government. Addressing these various competing policy objectives at the same time necessitates a dual approach, that includes the government complex bureaucracy. This is necessary to advance people's resilience and preservation of the well-beings at the highest level, at the same time coordinating and collaborating with local governments and different kinds of stakeholder.

While the Philippine government has been doing its best to preclude the transmission of COVID-19 pandemic to the localities, the different local government units (LGUs) have been also coming up with their own measures, in accordance with national directives, to cushion the effects of the pandemic, let alone to mitigate its impact. The Zamboanga Peninsula CoVid-19 Regional Recovery Program 2020-2022, reported by the National Economic Development Authority Region IX (NEDA Region IX), has identified areas where the LGUs in Zamboanga Peninsula are assessed as to the effectiveness and efficiency of managing the transmission of CoVid-19 in their respective communities. These areas are: (1) proactivity of LGUs, (2) imposition of community quarantine, (3) compliance with national issuances, (4) temporary shelter for health workers, (5) Management of the Dead and Missing Person (MDM) team organization, (6) mandatory wearing of facemask, (7) Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) for LGUs' frontline workers, (8) utilization of Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (LDRRMF), (9) Work-From-Home arrangement, (10) funeral parlors and cadaver bags, (11) peace and security, (12) disposition of cases, and (13) others like support to LGUs. (NEDA-IX, 2022). This study utilized these thirteen (13) areas in assessing the responses of Zamboanga City in managing COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *A. Proactivity of Zamboanga City*

On March 24, 2020, Zamboanga City recorded its novel case of CoVid-19. Even before the first case was reported, the City Government of Zamboanga already implemented measures to preclude the virus from spreading to the city. The City Government put the city under lockdown through the implementation of the policy of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), although there was no evidence yet of the presence of the virus in the city. It even intensively checked all passengers aboard of flights originating from Manila. These measures were seen a factor in delaying the entry of the virus to the city. After its first reported case of CoVid-19, Mayor Beng Climaco, the City Mayor of Zamboanga then, immediately addressed the people of Zamboanga City through an urgent press briefing with the media. Quarantine measures were introduced the next day.

These forward-looking approaches were crucial in mitigating the transmission of the dreaded disease. After the first reported COVID-19 case in the country, the city had ample time and days to prepare before it reported its first case. This is primarily because of the proactive measures implemented by the City Government.

#### *B. Imposition of Community Quarantine in Zamboanga City*

President Rodrigo R. Duterte promulgated on March 16, 2020, the Proclamation No. 929, Series of 2020, declaring as state of calamity throughout the country due to CoVid-19 disease. By virtue of the same proclamation, an Enhanced Community

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Quarantine (ECQ) was also imposed beginning twelve (12) midnight, March 17, 2020. The proclamation also mandated that all government agencies and local government units (LGUs) must provide complete assistance and collaborate with each other. They are also required to mobilize the necessary resources promptly to carry out essential and urgent disaster response aid and measures in order to reduce and eliminate the risk of Covid-19.

Following the proclamation, the City Government banned motorcycle back riders and came up with the following policies: (1) LGU will provide free shuttle services for hospital workers; (2) barangays are directed to assist in transportation needs of their constituents for basic needs and emergencies; and (3) private companies providing essential services authorized under the guidelines are ordered to help in the transport of their workers. Additionally, the borders of the city were also closed which restricted the mobility and interzonal movements.

With the implementation of ECQ in the city and closure of borders, the City Government imposed mobility restrictions that were different from its neighboring provinces in the north (Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga del Norte) and in the island-provinces of the south (Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi). These varying degrees of implementation of the guidelines and restrictions resulted to hampered inter-zonal movements. Although the basis was far from scientific and empirical, the imposition of different and sometime conflicting restrictions was due to the mandate of the City Mayor to protect its people from the scourge of CoVid-19 and her sworn oath of doing all means necessary to protect them.

### C. Compliance of Zamboanga City with National Directives/Issuances

The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Regional Office IX has been monitoring the City Government of Zamboanga City, as well as other LGUs in the region, as to its compliance with national issuances promulgated by the national government since the issuance of Proclamation No. 929, s. 2022. There have been guidelines issued by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID) to manage the transmission of the virus and the Regional and Local Task Forces on CoVid-19 have been created also to that effect.

The DILG Regional Office IX identified twenty-six (26) areas of compliance among the LGUs in Region IX regarding the management of CoVid-19 in their respective areas of responsibility (AORs). The City Government of Zamboanga has been assessed based also on these areas.

Table 1 shows the compliance of the City Government of Zamboanga with national issuances. It further shows that the City Government of Zamboanga is compliant in all areas identified by the DILG Regional Office IX. In order to implement the national guidelines promulgated by IATF-MEID, the City Mayor Beng Climaco issued EO BC 567-2020 outlining the policies of the City Government in the management of COVID-19. These data are corroborated by a report by NEDA-IX (2022) contained in Zamboanga Peninsula COVID-19 Regional Recovery Program 2020-2022. According to the report, despite having little resources and expertise to create a vaccine or medication to eradicate the virus, the government persisted in its endeavors to reduce the rate of infection and minimize its impact. Local governments serve as the means by which these things are accomplished. Every local government unit (LGU) in the region has already formed their own COVID-19 Task Forces and BHERTs (Barangay Health Emergency Response Teams). Overall, the local governments in the region have been successful in avoiding and reducing the spread of the virus inside their communities. They are watchful in order to preserve the zero-case status and minimize, if not eliminate, the spread of the virus within the population, especially in places where cases have already been verified.

**Table 1. Areas of Compliance with National Issuances**

| Areas of Compliance  | Zamboanga City |
|--|----------------|
| 1. LCEs present in their AOR   | Compliant      |
| 2. CoVid-19 Task Force established   | Compliant      |
| 3. Functional BHERTs   | Compliant      |
| 4. BHERTs provided with PPEs   | Compliant      |
| 5. Local Disaster Risk Management Coordinating Council/Committee Reactivated | Compliant      |
| 6. Local Price Coordinating Council Reactivated                              | Compliant      |
| 7. Local Solid Waste Management Council Reactivated                          | Compliant      |
| 8. LGUs with established checkpoints   | Compliant      |
| 9. LGUs that issued policy on work from home arrangement in their AOR        | Compliant      |
| 10. LGUs that issued suspension of classes                                   | Compliant      |

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|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 11. LGUs that utilized their QRFs for assistance to indigent families and daily wage earners                  | Compliant |
| 12. LGUs that issued policy on implementation of strict home quarantine                                       | Compliant |
| 13. LGUs implementing closure of identified establishments  | Compliant |
| 14. LGUs enforcing suspension of mass public transportation   | Compliant |
| 15. LGUs complying with the directive on unrestricted movement of frontline workers and cargoes               | Compliant |
| 16. LGUs that provide skeletal workforce in their AOR   | Compliant |
| 17. LGUs that provide transportation to residents needing medical assistance/attention                        | Compliant |
| 18. LGUs that are implementing curfews  | Compliant |
| 19. LGUs that designated isolation units  | Compliant |
| 20. LGUs implementing social distancing   | Compliant |
| 21. LGUs enforcing prohibition of mass gathering  | Compliant |
| 22. LGUs conducting disinfection/decontamination activities of public places                                  | Compliant |
| 23. LGUs that comply with the standard process on the management of human remains for PUI and confirmed cases | Compliant |
| 24. LGUs that provide PPE to medical staff, local health workers, PNP and BFP personnel                       | Compliant |
| 25. LGUs with established Health Information Center   | Compliant |
| 26. LGUs that provide basic needs to PUMs, PUIs, and COVID-19 positive patients such as food, vitamins, etc.  | Compliant |

\* Source: DILG IX

### D. Temporary Shelter for Health Workers in Zamboanga City

As reported around the country, health workers have been facing discrimination due to the baseless accusation that they are carriers of the virus. With this, the DILG issued Memorandum Circular No. 2020-072 on April 12, 2020, in accordance with IATF-MEID Resolution No. 19, which strongly condemned different discriminatory acts against healthcare workers, Overseas Filipinos Workers (OFWs), and COVID-19 positives, and directed the LGUs to address the discrimination against the said individuals, particularly the health workers. The DILG Memorandum Circular also enjoined the LGUs to offer temporary shelter or accommodation to ensure the safety and protection of health workers at province or city hospitals and other public health institutions that serve COVID-19 patients, in order to prevent prejudice.

Some hotels in Zamboanga City were built as temporary shelters for health workers. The City Government reached an agreement with some hotel concessionaires to house health workers who were unable to return home due to concerns that the virus would infect their families. Others were accommodated in temporary shelters or hotels, such as those who had been renting in boarding houses or dormitories but were asked to vacate by their landlords or landladies due to the stigma that health workers are carriers of the virus. The city government has been sympathetic to the plight of the city's health workers.

### E. MDM Team Organization in Zamboanga City

As part of the government's response to President Duterte's declaration of a State of Public Health Emergency throughout the country due to COVID-19 pandemic, the DILG, through Memorandum Circular No. 2020-063 dated 27 March 2020, issued guidelines on the proper handling of the remains of COVID-19 patients and PUIs. The DILG guidelines include the implementation of biosafety and infection control practices is mandatory for local chief executives, DILG regional directors, the Philippine National Police, the Bureau of Fire Protection, and other local officials (Oracion, 2020).

Oracion (2020) stressed that the guidelines primarily advise the use of standard and transmission-based protocols like frequent hand washing and use of PPEs, but prohibitions specific to the current pandemic have also been provided. The commissioning of "reputable funeral parlors and crematoriums" to handle the remains of COVID-19 positives and PUIs is one



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notable provision. In addition to the burial or cremation of the deceased individuals, these funeral homes and crematoriums will handle the transportation of the human remains of COVID-19 positives and PUIs if these individuals die outside of the medical facilities.

In compliance with the DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-063 issued on March 27, 2020, the City Government of Zamboanga organized its MDM Team which comprised of the following: City Local Government Operations Officer, City Civil Registrar, City Health Officer, City Social Welfare and Development Officer, City General Services Officer, PNP in the city, BFP in the city, City Engineer, City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer, and Punong Barangays, and reputable funeral parlor in the city. The tasks of this team include but are not limited to the management and proper disposition of the human remains. This team also coordinates with other agencies as well as funeral homes and crematoriums in the city.

### *F. Mandatory Wearing of Face Mask in Zamboanga City*

On April 20, 2020, the DILG issued Memorandum Circular No. 2020-071, mandating the wearing of face masks or other protective equipment in public places. The circular also enjoined LGUs to enforce the compulsory use of face masks by all individuals in public spaces, whenever they are permitted to leave their residences, without exception. Municipal Government Units (LGUs) are required to enact municipal ordinances, executive orders, or advisory that mandate the use of face masks. These measures may include penalties for residents who do not comply.

Even before the issuance of the DILG circular, the City Government of Zamboanga, through its Mayor Beng Climaco, already issued Executive Order No. 532, Series of 2020, mandating the wearing of face masks in public and penalizing the violators thereof. In coming up with this executive order, the City Government of Zamboanga took a proactive measure in preventing the further transmission of COVID-19 virus.

### *G. PPE for Zamboanga City's Frontline Workers*

COVID-19 had taken everyone by surprise. Because of its nature, it required the strict use of PPEs not only by medical and health care workers, but also by the general public. This situation caused the demand curve to shift significantly to the right, resulting in a supply shortage with the supply curve unable to keep up. According to NEDA IX (2022), this could be one of the reasons why many of the region's LGUs were unable to provide PPEs for their respective BHERTs. Individuals who are assigned as BHERTs should be adequately protected as frontline workers. Individuals who are assigned to man the barangay entrance and exit checkpoints should also follow the same protocol.

Zamboanga City was no exception. It also struggled in providing its frontline workers with PPEs as the demand for it increased and the supply increased. As a result, some PPEs were being worn twice or even thrice. The City Government allotted a budget for the procurement of additional PPEs for the frontline workers.

### *H. Utilization of the Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Fund by Zamboanga City*

According to Section 21 of Republic Act No. 10121, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, at least 5% of the projected income from normal sources must be allocated as the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (LDRRMF) to provide financial support for actions related to managing and reducing the risks associated with disasters. 30% of the allocated funds will be allocated as a Quick Response Fund (QRF) or emergency fund for relief and recovery programs. The purpose of this fund is to quickly restore the situation and living conditions of individuals in communities or areas affected by disasters, calamities, epidemics, or complex emergencies. Additionally, it stipulates that any remaining LDRRMF will be transferred to a dedicated trust fund only meant to support the disaster risk reduction and management operations of the LDRRMCs for the following five years.

The declaration of a State of Calamity throughout the country gave LGUs access to the QRF, which was bolstered by the passage of Republic Act No. 11469, also known as the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, which allowed for the use of more than five (5%) of the calamity fund, among other things.

Among the LGUs in Region IX, it was reported that Zamboanga City, together with Isabela City, had the lowest utilization of LDRRMF. The QRF was only utilized once (50.1%-70%); 70% of the fund was also utilized once; and there is no report of utilization of the Special Trust Fund. Hence, Zamboanga City has had enough fund to be utilized in addressing COVID-19 pandemic and future contingencies.

### *I. Work-From-Home Arrangement in Zamboanga City*

Both the DILG and the CSC issued memorandum circulars for the implementation of work-from-home arrangements. DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-062, dated 22 March 2020, mandates the LGUs to implement the work from home policy for their employees as instructed in the Memorandum of the Executive Secretary for the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in Luzon. CSC Announcement No. 13, Series of 2020, provides exemptions for frontline services related to health, emergency

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response, waste collection, border control, and other essential services, to the extent possible. Only a minimal number of employees will be allowed to work in the exempted frontline services. Nevertheless, in the event of a valid requirement, the Local Government Unit (LGU) has the authority to request its employees to supplement its personnel in order to provide crucial fundamental services. Additionally, Local Government Units (LGUs) have the authority to summon the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) to seek additional personnel if needed.

Also, CSC Memorandum Circular No. 10, series of 2020, dated 07 May 2020, provides for Revised Interim Guidelines for Alternative Work Arrangements and Support Mechanisms for Workers in the Government During the Period of State of National Emergency Due to COVID-19 Pandemic, which covers the LGUs.

### *J. Funeral Parlors and Cadaver Bags in Zamboanga City*

Section 4.6 of DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-063 states that Local Government Units (LGUs) should assign and authorize trustworthy funeral homes and crematoria to manage the bodies of proven COVID-19 cases and Persons Under Investigation (PUIs). Additionally, they should offer financial support to cover various costs such as logistics, petrol, salaries, and other expenses related to the transportation of human remains.

As reported by the Zamboanga City Health Office (CHO), the total number of COVID-19 deaths is one thousand two hundred sixty-three (1,263), the highest in the Zamboanga Peninsula. There are several funeral homes in Zamboanga City, but only one or two have been designated or commissioned to handle the remains of COVID-19 victims. A number of these cases involve Muslims. The City Health Office trained the team of Muslim Imams who handle the remains of Muslim COVID-19 victims, following strict protocols and guidelines. According to Sheikh Mahir Gustaham, one of the Muslim scholars in the city, despite having a large team of medical doctors (including a group of Muslim medical doctors), they have the capability to collaborate with Muslim religious leaders and scholars, enabling the latter to carry out their responsibilities.

Many of the cadaver bags were donated by local humanitarian organizations, while others were purchased by the city government. According to Patel et al. (2020), to address this situation for Covid-19 victims who died of the dreaded disease, cadaver bags should be integrated 5-layer body bags which must include the following characteristics: (1) it must be impervious to leaks, (2) it must be impermeable or waterproof, (3) it must be sufficiently sturdy for its intended function, (4) it must be constructed with ergonomic considerations in mind, and (5) it must include a feature that allows the family to glimpse the deceased's face prior to cremation or burial. This approach would reduce the amount of contact with the departed corpse during its transit from the hospital or place of death to a mortuary, and subsequently to the deceased's home, burial ground, or Crematory. This would allow for the respectful disposal of the body while minimizing the danger of infection for those involved.

### *K. Peace and Security in Zamboanga City*

According to the Philippine National Police Regional Office IX (PNP-PRO IX), there has been significant decrease in the crime incidents in the region. Rape and stabbing incidents have decreased significantly, while vehicular accidents have also decreased. PNP-PRO IX stressed that lower crime rate is due to increased law enforcement efforts to keep criminals at bay while the enhanced quarantine is in effect.

In Zamboanga City, the crime incidents dropped in 2020, a year which the COVID-19 pandemic started. As corroborated by the PNP-PRO IX, the significant drop on the crime incidents in the city is due to the enforcement of quarantine measures like lockdowns and mobility restrictions.

### *L. Disposition of Cases in Zamboanga City*

The disposition of cases in the region has been hampered due to the enforcement of quarantine measures to prevent the further transmission of COVID-19 virus such as lockdowns and mobility restrictions. The same also the case in Zamboanga City. The City Government usually conducted disinfection in the hall of justice where the courts were closed and operated through virtual platforms. Judges and court personnel worked from home during the conduct of disinfection.

### *M. Various Support to Zamboanga City*

The City Government of Zamboanga is not alone in combating the scourge of COVID-19. Aside from the help it gets from the national government, there are a number of non-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations who have extended their helping hand to the city. Many of these organizations have donated PPEs, cadaver bags, medicines, to name a few. Moreover, the City Government of Zamboanga City has been in constant coordination and collaboration with line agencies in the city.

### IV. CONCLUSION

As a result of the steps implemented by the City Government of Zamboanga, the number of COVID-19 cases has continued to decline, as has the usage rate of healthcare facilities. Except for the requirement to wear face masks in public, restrictions have been loosened. The City Government of Zamboanga continues to urge the people to maintain vigilance and adhere to fundamental health practices.

Zamboanga City's management of COVID-19 has been effective, as indicated by the decline in COVID-19 cases and deaths. Despite this, compared to other local government units in the region, Zamboanga City has the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This is predicted given that Zamboanga City is the most populated LGU in the region and a highly urbanized city.

According to the COVID-19 tracker of the DOH, there are 32,490 confirmed cases, 134 active cases, and 0 deaths in Zamboanga City. Of these cases, 96.93%, or 31,492 people, have already recovered, while 2.27% or 739 people, have died. In the city's 14 healthcare facilities, 347 beds are available. 17 percent, or 61, of these beds are occupied, while 286 are unoccupied. The occupancy rate continues to be low at 13%. On the basis of these findings, it can be concluded that Zamboanga City has been able to strike a balance between the safety of its residents and the recovery of its economy.

However, there are still failures and errors in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and responses of Zamboanga City, notwithstanding the positive results reported by NEDA-IX, DILG-IX and DOH-IX. These glitches and lapses include but are not limited to following: (1) the city's resources are insufficient to combat another surge or pandemic; (2) there are no alternative revenue collection measures; (3) there is a lack of coordination between the officials and the public; (4) traditional business transactions and operations increase the risk of transmission; (5) there is a lack of an effective mechanism in the management of funds for COVID-19 efforts; (6) there is a lack of transparency regarding the large sums of money spent by the city; (7) there is lack of technical capabilities in the management of COVID-19 pandemic among city officials; (8) there is inadequate mechanism for information dissemination among the barangays in the city; (9) the implementation of the basic health protocols like social distancing and wearing of face masks is sometimes taken for granted; and (10) the decisions of the city officials are sometimes not evidenced-based or scientific-based.

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