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Romualdez urges House to check compliance with PWD exemptions

MANILA, Philippines — Representative-elect Martin Romualdez of Leyte province on Sunday asked the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) to update the public and Congress on the compliance rate of a law exempting persons with disability from payment of value-added tax (VAT) on certain goods and services.

Romualdez, principal author of Republic Act No. 10754 or an Act Expanding the Benefits and Privileges of Persons with Disability (PWDs), urged the House of Representatives to exercise its oversight function to assess how the law was being implemented.

RA 10754, which was signed into law by President Benigno Aquino III on March 23, 2016, exempts more than 1.5 million PWDs from the 12-percent VAT on certain goods and services.

“We want to know from the government how the concerned people have been complying with this law. We should show malasakit (concern) over the plight of our PWDs,” said Romualdez, president of the Philippine Constitution Association and Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats.

“We just want to ensure that PWDs are enjoying the benefits they deserve under the law three years after its enactment,” he said. “Let us work to beef up efforts in informing the public about the standards set by law for the rights and privileges of our PWDs,” he added.

Expanded benefits

The law’s IRR (implementing rules and regulations) expanding the benefits and privileges of PWDs was signed by then Social Welfare Secretary Judy Taguiwalo and officials of the Department of Health and NCDA.

The VAT exemption is on top of the 20-percent discount that PWDs have been enjoying under RA 9442 or an act amending RA 7277 or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons and for other Purposes.

It applies to restaurants and recreation centers, such as theaters, movie houses and concert halls, as well as lodging establishments, such as inns, motorists’ hotels and dormitories.

Purchases of medicines

It covers the purchase of medicines and food for special medical purposes; medical and dental services, including laboratory fees and the professional fees of attending doctors; fares for domestic air, sea and land transportation travel; and funeral and burial services.

All establishments are required to place signs listing the benefits and privileges of PWDs within their premises.

The law also includes the provision of tax incentives for those caring for and living with PWDs up to the fourth degree of affinity or consanguinity.

To avail themselves of the exemptions, PWDs should present an ID issued by the Persons with Disability Affairs Office or their local Social Welfare Development Office where the PWD resides, passport or an ID issued by the NCDA.

Romualdez, the leader of the so-called House independent bloc of the 16th Congress when he pushed for the measure, said the DSWD, the NCDA and the House should also look into the possible cases of abuse by some people in the privileges granted to PWDs.

“Only legitimate PWDs should benefit from the law,” he pointed out.