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COA to audit vaccine procurement at proper time

By EDU PUNAY

The Commission on Audit (COA) will look into the government's purchase of COVID-19 vaccines despite non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) with manufacturers regarding prices.

At a budget hearing last Friday, COA chairman Michael Aguinaldo revealed that state auditors will conduct an audit on all expenditures related to vaccines at the proper time.

"At a certain point in time that will be submitted to us and we will be able to see. It's easy to check because there are a lot of resources online where we can find how much are these vaccines being sold for. We will find out all of that once we do the audit," he told congressmen.

But Aguinaldo explained that the audit, which would cover

purchases of vaccines as well as use of donated vaccines, might not be sooner since "it's an activity for 2022."

Upon questioning by Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, the COA chief said the expenditures of the Department of Health (DOH) and the National Task Force against COVID-19 for the purchases of various brands of vaccines would be audited despite the invocation of NDAs.

Aguinaldo explained that the non-disclosure provisions were a requirement of the manufacturers.

He clarified that the COA would be exempted from NDAs as it is part of the audit body's constitutional mandate to look into government transactions.

"I would tend to look at the duty of the commission or the power of the commission as an exemption to an NDA. An NDA is

governed by whatever the stipulations state but I think it's a given exemption that, of course, there are government processes that have to be followed," the COA chief pointed out.

The government has set aside P82.5 billion for its massive COVID-19 vaccination program, of which P2.5 billion will come from the DOH's budget allocation for 2021, while P10 billion will be sourced from the COVID-19 vaccination program of the Bayanihan 2 Law.

Meanwhile, the remaining P70 billion will be sourced from loans provided by multilateral lenders, the Philippines' bilateral partners and/or the domestic market.

Vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. earlier said that the Philippines would lose its 148 million doses of vaccines should there be violation of NDAs.