

DBM releases Bayanihan II funds for OFW repatriation

October 16, 2020 | 12:04 am

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has released P820 million in additional funds for the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to help with the repatriation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

The DBM issued Tuesday the special allotment release order (SARO) that will augment DFA's assistance to nationals (ATN) fund, as authorized by Republic Act No. 11494 or the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan II).

More than 250,000 OFWs have been repatriated to date, with the government expecting the number to reach 300,000 by year's end. The ATN fund has a P1-billion budget each year.

So far, funds released under Bayanihan II amounted to P4.2 billion, or 2.5% of the P165.5-billion total. President Rodrigo R. Duterte signed into law the relief measure on Sept. 11 and it expires at the end of 2020.

The DBM released P855.19 million to the Department of National Defense last week for operating coronavirus facilities, and P2.523 billion to the Department of the Interior and Local Government on Oct. 2 for the hiring and training of contact tracers, according to the issued SAROs.

A SARO allows agencies to incur obligations that will cover the funding needs of specific programs or projects.

Budget Assistant Secretary Rolando U. Toledo has said the DBM will release the budget allocations under Bayanihan II upon the request of implementing agencies and after necessary documents are processed. The Bureau of the Treasury also has to certify that funds are available.

"The DBM will release the necessary funding requirements under Bayanihan II upon receipt of the request together with the usual supporting documents from the respective implementing agencies and certification from the Bureau of the Treasury of the availability of funds. Said request will be evaluated by the DBM consistent with existing budgeting laws, rules and regulations," Mr. Toledo said via Viber last month days after the law was passed.

Bayanihan II has a P140-billion budget plus a P25.5-billion standby fund to help sectors affected by the ongoing pandemic.

Other relief measures included in the stimulus package are P40 billion in capital infusions to government financial institutions to help them expand their lending; P24 billion to the Agriculture department for cash aid and loan programs; P9 billion to assist the transportation industry; P3 billion to help state universities and colleges organize for online learning; and P3 billion for the cash-for-work program for the jobless. — **Beatrice M. Laforga**

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