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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Quezon City, February 15, 2021.** Today marks the 11<sup>th</sup> year since the Republic Act 9994 or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010 - where the social pension is one of the provisions – was signed on February 15, 2010. Since then, more than 3.7 million indigent senior citizens are receiving a P500 per month social pension.

The program expanded gradually, with budget allocation from P870 million in 2011 to P23.45 billion this year (2021) with 3.8 million (3,835,066) target beneficiaries. With this budget, more than P447 million, based on the data of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), are allotted for administrative costs and personnel services.

Although the social pension benefit amounting to P3,000/semester or P6,000/year is considerably low, it helps social pensioners to augment their medical and daily needs. According to a 2016 study<sup>1</sup>, the social pension is having a meaningful impact on the income and expenditure of recipients. The social pension constitutes – on average – almost a third of household income, suggesting that it makes an important contribution to these households. Recipients also reported that their households were more likely to have enough money for food than non-recipients.

However, according to the same report, there's a continuing challenge concerning the verification of recipients at the local level and other implementation issues such as delays in the payment schemes. While several improvements were made in the program (*e.g pilot testing of cash cards*), the same issues stand until today.

Based on the data of the DSWD, as of December 31, 2020, almost 15 and 9 percent of the social pension beneficiaries for 2020 and 2019 respectively, were still not paid.

Ms. Emily Beridico, Executive Director of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. (COSE) said that COSE "has received reports from the Older Citizens Monitoring Committee (OCMC)<sup>2</sup> that some social pensioners have died while waiting for their stipend. It's heartbreaking to know that the benefit that supposed to be used by older persons themselves for their food and medicines will no longer be of use."

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<sup>1</sup> Knox-Vydmannov, C., Sevilla, A., Horn, C., (2016) *The Philippines at Four Years: Insights and Recommendations.*

<sup>2</sup> Older Citizen Monitoring Committee (OCMC) is community-based monitoring composed of senior citizens

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COSE states that while it's clear that unresolved administrative issues such as recurrent delays in the payment release of the P500 stipend; the lack of personnel; and the absence of a unified database system for the beneficiaries of the social pension program are challenges that facing the implementing agency of the Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens Program (SPISCP), an improved and reformed social pension program is highly needed.

Ms. Beridico added that COSE commended the budget insertion for the social pension program because it means an additional 45,192 indigent older persons will be benefiting from this. However, COSE, together with the Aksyon sa Pensyon (AKAP) Coalition, and Confederation of Senior Citizens Association of the Philippines (COPAP), is calling for the implementing agency to ensure the timely delivery of the benefit and that all unpaid social pension beneficiaries from 2019 and 2020 will receive their stipend at the soonest time possible.

AKAP Coalition and COPAP also emphasize and are calling for the government to expand the coverage of the social pension program by including all older persons with no pension from any form. By doing this, 31% of the 2019 estimated 9.1 million population who are not necessarily living below the poverty line (*thus not qualified to the social pension program*) but worked in the private and informal sectors and do not have enough and spare income during their productive years to contribute to a pension system like the SSS will be benefited.

Fortunately, there are bills filed both in the House of Representatives and Senate to amend the social provisions of the RA 9994. This includes Senate Bill 160 filed by Senator Riza Hontiveros, which aims to amend the social pension provision by expanding the coverage of beneficiaries to include all older persons aged 65 and above and indigent older persons aged 60-64, and also doubling the benefit amount from P500 to P1,000.

"It's been 11 years since RA 9994 was pass into law, 10 years since the social pension program has been implemented, and five (5) years since we at COSE, AKAP, and COPAP have been calling for social pension reform. We hope that this year, our call of a social pension reform be finally granted," says Dioscoro Benalla of the COPAP.

