

07102019 SPEECH FOR ZUELG FAMILY FOUNDATION EVENT ON THE FIRST 1000 DAYS LAW

DATE AND TIME: JULY 10, 2019, 12 noon to 4:30PM

VENUE: SGV Hall, 3rd Floor AIM Conference Center, Benavides Street, Makati

THEME: The need for local leadership to achieve better nutrition outcomes

TOPIC: First 1000 Days law and local government

To his Excellency Ambassador John Holmes of Canada, Mr. Joel Spicer, CEO and President of Nutrition International, Mr. Andrew O’Connell, and Dr. Loreto Roquero, also of Nutrition International, to the Board of Trustees of Zuellig Family Foundation: former Health Secretary Esperanza Cabral and Mr. Reiner Gloor, ZFF President former DAR Secretary Prof. Ernie Garilao, ZFF EVP former DILG Usec Austere Panadero, to our fellow civil servants from the DOH, NNC, DOLE, Asec. Rosette Vergeire, Asec. Alex Avila, to our partners in local government, Mayor Lucio Bayron from Puerto Princesa, Mayor Lina Montilla of Tacurong City, honored guests and friends, thank you for having me with you today.

The importance of strong partnerships with local government for better health outcomes can’t ever be overstated, especially for a law as critical to our future as the First 1000 Days Law or the “Kalusugan at Nutrsyon ng mga Nanay Act.” Republic Act 11148 was signed on November 29 of last year, and I remember saying that it was the best holiday present to mothers and infants, and I still think that’s true. Because what this

measure really gives every Filipino family is a path to a better future that leans on the strong pillar of better health.

Many if not all of us here know all too keenly the long term dangers posed by malnutrition and stunting. They are linked to vulnerability to disease, poor performance in school, and generally poorer health when a child grows to adulthood. Which is why providing a comprehensive national strategy for the improvement of health in the first 1000 days is that “golden window” we should never let close. I’m humbled to do my part in authoring the bill. And again I’d just like to take this time to say that this law would not have been possible without the engagement, and the collective work of everyone involved – sa ating mga kasama mula sa DOH, National Nutrition Council, and all our partners in civil society who worked with us to make this law a reality, we share this victory with you.

The First 1,000 Days Law forms part of an overarching strategy to look after health in all of its dimensions, working in tandem with other laws I’ve authored to put forward a more complete response to the health needs of our people. The Expanded Maternity Leave Law strengthens the reproductive rights of expectant mothers and puts us at par with international maternity leave standards. The Mental Health Law is our nation’s first national policy on mental health, and works to dispel the stigma that those who cope with mental health struggles face. The Anti-Hospital Deposit Law ensures that those who need urgent emergency care receive the help they need without being hampered by deposit requests from hospitals or clinics.

And last, but certainly not least is the Universal Health Care Law, which strengthens our health system and helps secure additional resources to

finance critical improvements in our health care delivery system seek to ensure that all Filipinos get access to the health services they need, whenever they need it.

Going back to the First 1,000 Days Law, it will be equally important to see that the programs mandated by this measure find their way into our communities. In this regard, the local government is the heart and soul behind the implementation of this law. It's an understatement to say that coordination will be vital, but it is a message that always bears repeating, especially since this law is new. Our initial experiences will be important in strengthening programs for the future. Section 12 of the law provides for capacity building for our Barangay Health and Nutrition Volunteers, while Section 17 mandates that all LGU must involve their stakeholders regular monitoring, review, and impact assessments to ensure sustainability. This is where partnerships with the private sector, with organizations like the Zuellig Family Foundation and Nutrition International and even with other nations like Canada which has generously supported these worthwhile endeavors, form a cornerstone to achieving our goal of better nutrition and health outcomes for all Filipinos.

I'm sure that our friends and partners in local government will be mindful that as we flesh out our programs, the most vulnerable members of society remain the center of our focus and care. I'm certain as well that our partners in the LGUs understand that to really reach the marginalized segment of our population requires a systematic and scientific approach to planning and implementation as well as the political commitment to support nutrition programs with adequate resources. As we launch the Urban Nutrition Governance Program for F1k which is designed to assist 3 cities implement nutrition and health

programs, my sincere hope is for this initiative to succeed and for this initiative to become a viable template for other LGUs to follow.

From our end, we will continue supporting efforts to achieve our country's goals for nutrition through policy and legislation. In fact, we are currently exploring the ideas for the promotion of healthier food choices, especially for our children. This idea has found some traction in canteens and cafeterias in some of our schools, and I think it's a sensible thing to look at. You can be sure that my team and I will be eager to sit down with you once we have more concrete plans on the board. And should you have any suggestions, my door is always open.

But to go back to the reason why we're here today, Republic Act 11148 sends a very clear message about what our health priorities are for this country. And together with the Expanded Maternity Leave Law, and the Mental Health law, they represent our commitment to better health outcomes for all Filipinos in all areas of health for the complete human person.

A cliché goes that it takes a village to raise a child. It will take all of us, working together to deliver the promise of health to every child in every village in the country. And I know that with your help, this promise is not far away.

Maraming salamat! Onward to better health! Mabuhay po tayong lahat!