

Column for Manila Bulletin
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September 4, 2012

Of Trees and Forest

Leave Credits For OFW Spouses

MANILA, Philippines — I have proposed the enactment of a law by Congress that will grant special leave credits to spouses of overseas Filipino workers. It's really a way of giving back to the OFWs, numbering over 10 million, who have helped and continue to help with their remittances of dollars and other foreign currencies, in the growth of our domestic economy.

I'm referring to Senate Bill 2588, which seeks to allow all legitimate spouses of overseas workers who are employees in the private and public sectors, to avail of an additional seven- day special leave credit yearly with full pay, which may be used to meet the needs of their families.

As founder of the Sagip OFW Helpline, I know well that families of the OFWs suffer the loneliness of being apart from their loved ones while the overseas workers endure the pain of solitude and isolation in distant lands just to give their families a decent living.

The special leave credits to OFW spouses can be a means for them to reconnect and enjoy the many things they are blessed with as a family.

Under the proposed legislative measure, employees availing of this leave privilege are required to submit to their employer the name of spouse, copy of their marriage contract, information as to the nature and place of work of the OFW, and a copy of the OFW's passport.

The bill defines overseas worker as a person who is engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a legal resident.

Not allowed to avail of this leave are those who are absent from work without official leave; those who are on vacation, sick, forced or study leave, or those who have already availed of other forms of leave allowed by law; and those whose services are necessary to prevent loss of life or damage to property, brought about by serious accidents, fires, floods, typhoons, earthquake, epidemic, or other disasters.

The bill also seeks to give income tax deduction from the employer's gross income for each taxable year, based on the actual cost paid by the private establishment in granting this leave to its qualified employees. But, once enacted into law, any employer found violating it, will be punished with a fine not exceeding Php 25,000 or imprisonment of 30 days to six months.

I hope that Senate Bill No. 2588 will be passed by Congress this year or before it adjourns for the mid-term elections in May, 2013, for the sake of our modern-day heroes and their families.

(For comments/feedback email to: mbv_secretariat@yahoo.com. Readers may view previous columns at www.senatorvillar.com)

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