

## Divorce bill marches on; CBCP warns of its 'costs'

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The House of Representatives approved the divorce bill on second reading on Wednesday night—the highest stage reached by the contentious measure in Congress.

By a voice vote, the 292-member chamber endorsed House Bill No. 7303, which would allow divorce and dissolution of marriage in the predominantly Catholic country.

The bill's sponsor, Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, who headed a subcommittee that consolidated differing versions of the proposal, introduced a number of amendments before it was put to a vote.

### Just two days

The House bill underwent just two days of plenary debates.

The bill's version enjoys bipartisan support among the lawmakers, including Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, who is one of its authors.

The grounds for divorce identified in the bill include all the grounds for annulment or nullification of marriage, including psychological incapacity.

### Other grounds

Other grounds identified by Lagman's subcommittee are de facto separation for 5 years, cases where marriage is irreparable or beyond repair, cases where spouses have already gotten a judicial degree of legal separation for two or more years, irreconcilable differences which have resulted in a total breakdown of marriage, or when one of the spouses had a sex change.

Ahead of the vote, Catholic bishops urged lawmakers to "make room" for more "reasoned debates" on the bill, warning that marriages would break up if divorce is presented as an "easy option."

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines appealed to the lawmakers to consider the social costs of provid-

ing an easy recourse to the legal dissolution of marriages.

While it may provide a quick legal remedy for "seemingly failed marriages," divorce might end up destroying marriages that could otherwise be saved by dialogue or counseling, the prelates said in a statement.

"In a context in which divorce is presented as an easy option, marriages and families are bound to break up more easily. More children will grow up disoriented and deprived of the care of both parents," they added.

### Violation of Constitution

That is why, the bishops said, there is a need for lawmakers to consult their constituents and experts on the matter.

Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza, one of the vocal opponents of the bill, said divorce did not conform to the 1987 Constitution, which states that "marriage, as an inviolable social institution, is the foundation of the family and shall be protected by the State." INQ

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