

Fast-track subsidies to offset TRAIN law – Poe

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LEGAZPI CITY – Sen. Grace Poe urged the government yesterday to immediately release the different subsidies for poor Filipinos as mandated by the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, to cushion the effects of the measure.

Poe lamented that while the government has started collecting taxes from the public after the TRAIN law took effect on Jan. 1, the subsidies included in the measure were not automatically and simultaneously released.

“The government must be compliant with the subsidies being mandated by the TRAIN law. If they are fast in collecting, they must also be equally fast in giving the subsidies,” Poe told the media in Filipino.

Poe, who chairs the Senate committee on public services, presided over a public hearing on the TRAIN law along with Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV here attended by representatives of transport groups, urban poor, businessmen, government officials, students and reporters.

She said the subsidies that need to be immediately released to the affected sectors are the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) and the fuel voucher for the public utility vehicle (PUV) drivers, whose representatives decried the negative impact of the new tax measure during the hearing.

Poe said the guidelines for these subsidies must be finished the soonest time possible.

Poe admitted that, even if she wanted to, the government could not easily suspend the law without carefully studying its adverse impacts on the different government programs, including the free tertiary education that needed some P40 billion in funding.

But Poe added the TRAIN law also has a built-in mechanism to suspend the excise taxes on fuel should the price of world crude reach \$80 dollars per barrel.

Poe also said they will seriously reconsider in the next budget hearing the clamor for a more significant subsidy for drivers.

“In the next budget hearing, we might reconsider increasing these subsidies,” Poe said.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) office in Bicol earlier announced that they already released the full one-year unconditional cash transfer (UCT) of P200 a month, or P2,400 for 12 months, to recipients of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) of the government.

The UCT for qualified senior citizens in July.

Poe also batted for the amendment of the TRAIN law’s provision on the prevailing inflation next year.

“For example, if the inflation rate has soared to six percent, some provisions of the TRAIN law could be temporarily suspended,” Poe said.

During the hearing, Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said the goal should be to make the TRAIN law work for everyone by providing subsidies. is to be released