

Roque opposes bill penalizing fake news purveyors

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Presidential spokesman Harry Roque and officials of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) opposed yesterday a proposed bill seeking to penalize government officials found to be purveyors of “fake news.”



Speaking before the Senate committee on civil service, government reorganization and professional regulation, Roque and PCOO Assistant Secretary Anna Marie Banaag said passing such legislation could do more harm than good, given the lack of a proper definition of fake news.

The committee, chaired by Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, was tackling Senate Bill 1680 filed by Sen. Grace Poe, who is seeking amendments to Republic Act 6713 or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, to include penalties for spreading fake news.

Roque said the Constitution mandates that no law should be passed abridging the freedom of expression.

“It’s important to have a free market of ideas, the assumption is that we let the people decide for themselves what is true or false. The second is there is this problem of who will determine what is true or not,” he told the committee.

The PCOO and its officials have been repeatedly criticized for allegedly spreading fake or erroneous releases on Malacañang.

Roque also said there are remedies for those victimized by fake news like suing for damages and better journalism for those in the profession.

He also warned the bill apparently violates the equal protection clause since it singles out those in government when upholding the truth is the responsibility of everyone. – Paolo Romero

“I’m not saying this is happening now but in the history of our country, those in the opposition will likely be the ones penalized,” he said.

Trillanes said there was nothing in the proposal that should be worrisome as it does not intend to hinder free speech.

He stressed that public officials are supposed to be held to a higher standard, so such a measure could deter any member of government from spreading fake news.