

Belmonte says IRR for QC gambling ordinance to be made in her term

QUEZON City Mayor-elect and outgoing Vice-Mayor **Maria Josefina G. Belmonte** said the city ordinance which will regulate gaming firms and require city residents to pay entrance fees to casinos may be implemented in her term as mayor.

“I think what we have to do is write the implementing rules and regulations and that is the task of the executive department. And the executive hasn’t written the implementing rules and regulations yet, so tingin ko ako na siguro, panahon ko na siguro yan mas ma-i-implement (I think it’s on me, it will be implemented during my term),” Ms. Belmonte said in phone interview.

The Quezon City Council on Oct. 1, 2018 approved Ordinance No. SP-2773, S-2018 which was in turn approved by Mayor **Herbert M. Bautista**. The ordinance, which was modeled after Singapore’s restrictions on gambling by residents, was aimed to protect Quezon City locals from developing gambling addictions.

The ordinance establishes the Gambling Regulatory Advisory Council which shall recommend the approval of permits, monitor gambling operations, and enforce the provisions of the ordinance with the help of the **Quezon City Police District**, Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR), and other operators of games of chance. It will also implement a 24-hour gambling helpline.

It will also require Quezon City residents to pay P1,500 if they want to play at a casino; P500 at e-games outlets; and P100 at e-bingo for every consecutive 24-hour period. Residents will have to pay P30,000 if the gambling establishment offers annual memberships.

According to the data from the city, there are 54 Betting/Off-Track Stations, four Betting/On-Line Bingo, 11 lotto outlets, and 13 online casinos (e-games) operating within the city in 2019.

PAGCOR expressed opposition to the city ordinance last March, asserting that it has the sole authority to regulate gambling operations, citing, among others, Presidential Decree No. 771 which revokes the authority of the local governments to issue licenses and permits for gambling operations.

Ms. Belmonte said the Quezon City government believes the enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991 has “devolved some of the regulatory functions for people’s

welfare to the local government” while the PAGCOR charter was authored much earlier.

“I believe it includes regulating gambling because I believe it is a vice, and I believe it is something that can affect the welfare of our constituents,” she said.

Ms. Belmonte said they have appealed to the PAGCOR to work together to curb problems in gambling and consider the “welfare aspect” of the ordinance more rather than the loss of revenue.

“Pero (But) having said that, they still register their opposition and they said that they will TRO (temporary restraining order) the measure,” she said, adding that she does not know when the TRO might be filed.

The mayor-elect said if PAGCOR deems filing a TRO as the appropriate act, the city government will “welcome” the move and whatever the decision of the Supreme Court is.

“Kung (if) the Supreme Court rules in favor of the local government, then that is a victory for all local governments because that means all local governments can now regulate in their respective jurisdictions. If the Supreme Court rules in favor of PAGCOR, we will respect the ruling of the Supreme Court,” she said.

Listed Bloomberry Resorts Corp. secured a 1.57 hectare site at the Ayala Vertis North Complex in Quezon City and is set to build another branch of the Solaire Casino on the land.

Ms. Belmonte said the QC government is not afraid of losing investments due to the ordinance, saying that there were appropriate public consultations during the proposal and all stakeholders were represented.

“All stakeholders were duly invited to and participated in our public consultations and they were able to submit their positions papers,” she said. “While there was opposition on the part of some gambling establishments, many also understood the need to protect the welfare of people, especially those who cannot afford to gamble.”

The ordinance was proposed by Councilors **Franz S. Pumaren, Ivy Xenia L. Lagman, Alexis R. Herrera, Raquel S. Malañgen, Marvin C. Rillo, and Godofredo T. Liban II.**

Ms. Belmonte is set to assume her post on June 30. — **Vann Marlo M. Villegas**