

Bill filed for FOI bill, info commission

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A BILL has been filed before the House of Representatives seeking to institutionalize the right to access to information and create a Freedom of Information Commission. Quezon City 5th District Rep. Alfred D. Vargas filed House Bill 5776 on Dec. 10, which, if passed, will be known as the “Freedom of Information Act of 2019.” Mr. Vargas said President Rodrigo R. Duterte’s Executive Order No. 2, which operationalizes the people’s right to information, is not enough given that “a mere Executive Order by one administration can easily be reversed by the next one.” The EO also covers only the government’s executive branch. “EO No. 2 does not and cannot cover other important government institutions like local governments, the legislature, independent constitutional bodies and the judiciary. Coverage of these other government instrumentalities can only be done by an act of Congress” Mr. Vargas said. He stressed the importance of making all statistical data on budgets, appropriations, and contracts in a machine readable format to ensure that “researchers and analysts will have a quicker and easier time in processing and analyzing data.” The bill also seeks to create an Information Commission that will oversee the implementation and enforcement of the freedom of information law. Mr. Vargas expressed optimism on the passage of the bill given majority support for Mr. Duterte in the legislature and House Speaker Alan Peter S. Cayetano’s previous position as chairman of the Senate committee on public information. “I have full faith that this 18th Congress is made up of men and women ready to deliver a landmark legislation that paves the way to an empowered and informed citizenry all contributing to good governance and our nation’s development,” he said. The bill is currently pending at the committee level. —