

## QC funeral parlors cannot reject COVID victims

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The Quezon City government has passed an ordinance imposing penalties on funeral parlors and crematoriums that refuse to accept the cadavers of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) victims.

Mayor Joy Belmonte approved the ordinance establishing protocols for the management of the deceased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the measure, funeral homes and crematoriums cannot reject deceased COVID-19 patients due to fear of infection or other unjustifiable reasons, Belmonte said.

Funeral homes and crematoriums in the city are also prohibited from increasing service fees.

“This is to protect the grieving families of deceased COVID-19 victims from unscrupulous funeral parlors and crematoriums that may take advantage of the situation,” Belmonte said.

Violators will be fined up to P5,000 per violation, with their business permits revoked.

The ordinance also mandates local hospitals and health care facilities in Quezon City to observe the mandatory cremation of COVID-19 fatalities within 12 hours from time of death to avoid the spread of the virus.

The local government will shoulder the costs of the cremation if the deceased is an indigent resident of the city.

If the family abandons the cadaver of the deceased or has failed to arrange for the cremation within 12 hours, the local government may take custody of the remains and have it cremated.

Violators will be fined P5,000 or penalized with up to six months in prison depending on the discretion of the court.

### Handling deaths

Belmonte has issued protocols to guide the 14 national government-run hospitals in Quezon City on the handling of COVID-related deaths.

“We have crafted guidelines to make sure that the cadavers are efficiently managed within our city,” she said, noting that the national-run hospitals have passed the responsibility of processing the burial or cremation of cadavers to the local government, whether the deceased is a resident or not.

Belmonte encouraged the hospitals to follow the 12-hour period for cremation as provided under guidelines of the Department of Health.

She also requested government hospitals to designate a point person who will coordinate with the local government to ensure that reports and referrals are coursed through the proper channel.

“The designated point person must report to the city government all unclaimed COVID-19 cadavers within a reasonable period of time,” Belmonte said.

She asked the government hospitals to ensure that the cadaver is properly stored in a morgue with freezer while waiting for the schedule of cremation or retrieval to halt untimely decomposition and control the spread of the virus.

**Stricter market rules**

To curb the transmission of COVID-19, Belmonte has ordered stricter implementation of precautionary measures such as physical distancing and sanitation procedures in public and private markets in the city.

“We understand that our residents still need to go out to buy food and other essentials. That’s why we make sure to keep them safe by enforcing social distancing and wearing of face masks,” she said.

Belmonte has prohibited retail selling at the Balintawak market after reports circulated that shoppers did not observe physical distancing.