

# VARGAS LAUDS PASSAGE OF BILL ON EVACUATION CENTERS

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QUEZON City 5th District Rep. Alfred Vargas lauded the passage of House Bill 8990, which mandates the building of evacuation centers in every city and town in the country.

Members of the House of Representatives were unanimous in passing the measure, which was principally authored by Vargas.

“I am grateful to my colleagues for recognizing the urgent need for permanent evacuation centers throughout the country. We should minimize the disruption experienced regularly by our people during calamities,” Vargas said.

Under the bill, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will determine the sites where evacuation centers will be built. These facilities should be constructed on stable land to avoid risk of landslides and must be far from large trees or structures, where hazardous materials are stored or high-power voltage lines.

The evacuation centers should have sleeping quarters, showers and toilets for men and women, food preparation areas, rainwater harvesting and collection areas and amenities for the disabled.

Vargas had earlier cited the negative effects of converting schools into evacuation centers.

“It is the education of our children that suffers because they are the one giving way whenever disasters strike. Permanent evacuation centers are necessary because of the frequent natural calamities and disasters our countrymen face,” the lawmaker said.

“We need to ensure that we house those affected by disasters in safe shelters. We should do away with the practice of using school facilities as evacuation centers,” he added.

The Department of Public Works and Highways shall be in charge in the construction of evacuation centers that will be designed to withstand super typhoons or wind speeds of at least 300 kilometers per hour and seismic activity of at least 8.0 magnitude.

The bill contains a provision that permits existing structures that would meet the minimum requirements or could be upgraded to be designated as evacuation centers “in compliance with the local government unit concerned.”

Vargas expressed hope that the Senate will soon pass its version of the measure.