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DOJ sets PI on 'Dengvaxia deaths'

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The Department of Justice (DOJ) is set to conduct a preliminary investigation (PI) over the deaths of five children who got inoculated with the anti-dengue vaccine Dengvaxia.

"The preliminary investigation is set to begin this May 15," said Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Chief Persida Acosta whose office represents the families of the five dead children.

The DOJ will conduct the preliminary investigation based on criminal complaints filed by the families of the five children, namely, Aejay Bautista, who was 11 years old when he died on Jan. 24, 2018; Anjielica Pestillos who was 10 when passed away on Dec. 5, 2017; Lenard Baldonado who 10 when he passed away on Nov. 9, 2017; Zandro Colite who was just 11 when he died on Dec. 27, 2017; and Abbie Hedia who was 13 when she died on Nov. 17, 2017.

The respondents have been accused of committing reckless imprudence resulting to homicide under Article 365 of the Revised Penal Code; and for torture committed against children and resulting to their deaths in violation of the Anti-Torture Act of 2009.

Those who have been named as respondents in the complaints are former Health Secretary Janette Garin; Drs. Socorro Lupisan and Maria Rosario Capeding of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM); and other officials of the Department of Health (DOH) who were involved in the purchase of the vaccine, namely, Vicente Belizario Jr., Kenneth Hartigan-Go, Gertardo Bayugo, Lyndon Lee Suy, Irma Ascuncion, Julius Lecciones, Joyce Ducusin, Rosalind Vianzon, and Mario Baguilod.

Vaccine manufacturer Sanofi Pasteur Inc. and distributor Zuellig Pharma Corporation were also included as respondents in each of the four complaints.

On the other hand, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III has been included as a respondent concerning the death of Hedia along with Maria Lourdes Santiago and Melody Zamudio of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).