

Corina Ivy C. Cabotage
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SOGIE Bill waiting for Senate approval; received critically

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) Equality Act, or the SOGIE Bill, is now in its final stages of drafting.

Formerly short-titled as Anti-Discrimination Bill, the bill seeks the recognition of the LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer, and Intersex) community, the respect of individuals who identify with different SOGIE, and their protection from all forms of discrimination.

Provisions under the bill were approved in the sixth meeting of the Women and Gender Equality committee adjourned by chairperson Rep. Emmeline Aglipay-Villar. These include recognition of civil rights and prosecution of those who violate the bill, among others.

One hundred and forty-one House members authored the bill, with Dinagat Islands Rep. Kaka Bag-ao first re-filing it in the 16th congress.

Bishop Bienvenido Abante Jr. of Bible Mode raised one of the arguments regarding Section 5 of the proposal and emphasized the church's exemption from prosecution as it "operates under religious tenets which view homosexuality as a sin". The section, eventually included in the bill's Declaration of Policy, manifests on the provision of punishment of individuals and associations that inflict verbal and physical harms on the LGBTQI.

Abante noted that if the LGBT forms a religion, "then there would not be a problem. You [LGBT] should just write your doctrinal statement and establish yourself as a religion, there's no problem with that," he said.

Bataan Rep. Geraldine Roman, one of the bill's original authors, declared Abante's claim as "absurd and sarcastic".

Roman reiterated that practice of religious freedom is already enshrined in the Constitution, while LGBTQI rights are not recognized even under civil laws.

"I'm sorry, but this bill is not based on the Bible but on the Constitution. We have to go back to the fact that we're living in a civilian society. What we're looking for are civil rights, the same rights as everyone else in the Philippines," Roman said.

Rep. Bag-ao ended the discussion by suggesting that "proper" wordings of the proposal from the religious organizations present should be provided.

Being vocal against the bill, the Catholic Church's previous statement raised that the bill opens doors to legalizing same-sex unions in the future.

Proponents, however, such as Rep. Bag-ao herself clarified that it would not, and lobbies only the provision of LGBTQI rights.

Earlier opposition also came from former homosexuals who stated that the bill discriminates those who had turned their back on "gay lifestyles".

In 2000, the Anti-Discrimination Bill was filed by Akbayan Rep. Etta Rosales and the late senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago, in hopes to advance LGBT rights. Since then, the bill has been re-filed into legislation. #