CONGRESS OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA
P.O. Box PS 3
Palikir, Sokehs
Pohnpei State, FM 96941
Tel: (691)320-2324/2325/2326/2327/2337/2338/2707
Fax: (691) 320-5122

COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH & SOCIAL AFFAIRS

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 21-57

RE: HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: OVERSIGHT HEARING WITH THE STATE AND NATIONAL COVID-19 TASK FORCES

JULY __, 2020
August 19, 2020

The Honorable Wesley W. Simina
Speaker, Twenty-First Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Sixth Special Session, 2020

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee held a hearing on JULY 8, 2020. The witnesses included several members of the National COVID-19 task force, in addition to members of the State COVID-19 task forces for the states of Chuuk, Yap and Kosrae. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Kosrae were also in attendance.

Chairman Perman welcomed the witnesses. Chairman Perman shared that Congress was working on amending the President's Emergency Declaration, to extend through September 30. He also noted that bringing home citizens is a priority and concern.

The states each made brief statements, each thanking the Committee for their invitation to participate in the hearing.

Chuuk State noted that they had issued a new emergency declaration because the previous one had expired and they were unable to get a quorum for their legislature to conduct business and to extend. Chuuk also shared that they are developing their facilities and conducting ongoing staff training. They are conducting their own simulation exercises. Their contract with High Tide for a quarantine location is up and they are trying to renegotiate.

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The Chairman of the FSM NTF expressed appreciation to everyone for their hard work. There have been a lot of accomplishments. The NTF continues to try and work with the states. He noted the importance of having people from the outside assisting with exercises to help identify weaknesses so gaps can be filled. He re-iterated that they are listening to the states and working closely with all of the state task forces.

Chairman Perman expressed concerned that there are people that were referred by the FSM on medical referral who have not been able to return. It's been several months and they have been waiting in various locations to stay safe. They have expressed that they don't want money, they want to come home. Chairman inquired, who is responsible if a citizen contracts COVID-19 and dies while they are stuck? He noted that the resolution will clarify that the only people who will be entering the FSM initially are FSM citizens before anyone else.

Floor Leader welcomed everyone. He then questioned what the procedure was from each of the states regarding how they respond to the resolutions that have been passed by the FSM Congress. What do the task forces do with all the recommendations that are included in the resolutions that have been passed by the FSM Congress?

Yap responded that the task force and the Department of Health are preparing for point of entry screening, contact tracing, isolation, community health centers, preparing to receive patients with symptoms. They still are faced with challenges regarding quarantine facilities. Yap is not prepared for quarantine with individual rooms with showers and toilet. They are getting medical supplies and equipment to help treat and care for COVID-19 patients.

Senator Harper indicated he wants to know what each state does with the specific recommendations by Congress? What about interstate travel?

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Secretary Taulung responded they are trying to identify places in Guam and Hawaii to help support the repatriation effort by assisting with testing. They have sources in Guam and Hawaii and are working on the procedures. He indicated that they will share through the consulate offices as soon as procedures and guidelines are finalized. He indicated the states need to have a level of readiness and confidence so that if a case arrives, they are ready to deal with it. The NTF is waiting for assurances from the 4 states, nothing that they do not need to wait for all the states to be ready to get started with the repatriation of FSM citizens.

The Vice-Speaker noted that there should be more public awareness of how the virus is spread. There does not appear to be a roadmap and plan of action that all of the Nation should be working towards and this is important for the unity of the Nation.

Chuuk STF agreed that the repatriation of medical patients is the top priority. They have identified who should be returning and there are 4 patients. They have identified where they can be tested prior to departure. He noted that they also need to ensure they are able to provide ongoing treatment to medical patients when they return.

Senator Palik welcomed the witnesses. He wondered if the states support the extension through the end of September. Also, he solicited any additional input that the states want to bring to the attention of Congress to be considered in the amendment. He is also in support of a roadmap to respond, noting that this should also consider the financial needs of each of the states. Kosrae anticipates needing $4 M to support their response but they only have $1.4 M available. He also expressed support for getting medical patients repatriated, sooner rather than later in light of the fact the second wave of infection has begun. Regarding amending the declaration, he urges the task forces communicate their needs to Congress for support. Regarding port of entry facilities, for example in Chuuk, if there are issues with flights, this need to be addressed. Senator Palik would

like to hear feedback regarding the coordination between the state and national task forces. Are there areas that there could be better coordination? He has been following the results of the simulation exercises. He noted that Kosrae has expressed their willingness to work with the NTF on simulation exercises. The NTF is providing support and guidance to the STFs, however, there needs to be a frank discussion about funding, resources, etc. Are there areas that need improvement? What can Congress and the NTF do to better assist?

Kosrae STF chair noted there are many challenges being faced. There is a need for unity across the Nation. Their task force has been providing weekly updates to the Governor with draft guidelines. Efforts have focused on facilities and guidelines and other SOPs from individual sectors, with rules to deal with the issue of readiness to accept stranded citizens. Today, the task force talked about their readiness, they anticipate the NTF arriving this weekend to assist with the simulation exercises to help prepare them to welcome home their citizens.

Chairman Perman expressed concern about people with NCDs and the vulnerability they create. The medical patients that were sent by the FSM on referrals are now stuck in places and being exposed to COVID-19. Diabetics are known to be very vulnerable. He is asking all the task forces to work together to identify areas of weakness. He encouraged everyone to utilize the interstate travel to work with NTF to assist with identifying gaps and identifying how we can support each other. He is not in support of opening up the borders for tourism or allowing any people from other nations to come into the FSM. Our vulnerable people need to be returned before we can consider others. We can learn from Palau, as they successfully repatriated their citizens.

Chairman Perman is asking all the task forces to work together to come up with a timeline that everyone can prepare for.

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Floor Leader noted that he knows everyone on the task forces and they are all very well equipped for their positions. He hopes everyone can come together and learn from Palau.

Senator Palik is asking for feedback from the STF regarding the amendment of the declaration or the remarks that have been made.

The state of Kosrae is requesting Congress consider the rare exceptions, including mechanical issues with airplanes, to allow passengers to have a humane process in the event of an emergency. They agree with the extension.

Chuuk will work on submitting something in writing related to the declaration by tomorrow.

Yap agrees with the extension to the declaration. They are struggling to ensure they have a good quarantine location in place. Need to ensure they can contain should a case arrive. Secretary of Justice noted his support for developing a roadmap for the nation so we can work together as a Nation.

The Secretary of Health and Social Affairs shared that the NTF continues to offer their support to all of the states and they will attempt to schedule a call with all the states shortly.

Chairman Perman shared that he wants to help as a leader in this Nation. He wants to make sure that he does everything he can to help citizens return to their families.

Your Committee on Health and Social Affairs will continue to monitor the FSM response to the Covid-19 virus and will work closely with the National and State Task Forces to ensure everyone has the support and resources they need to ensure the safety of our nation and our people.

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Respectfully submitted,

Ferny S. Perman, chairman

Tiwiter Aritos, vice chairman

Esmond B. Moses, member

Derensio S. Konman, member

Aren B. Palik, member

Florencio S. Harper, member

Joseph J. Urusemal, member

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