

Lawmaker pushes passage of underground cable system bill

By Jovee Marie de la Cruz – January 15, 2020

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TO ensure uninterrupted supply of power and telecommunications service during disasters, a deputy majority leader has pushed for the passage of the proposed Nationwide Underground Cable System Act.

In House Bill 5845, Bagong Henerasyon Party-list Rep. Bernadette Herrera-Dy said Davao City, Cagayan de Oro City, Cebu City and Baguio City have taken the initial steps to place their utility cables underground.

“Metro Manila and surrounding highly urbanized areas, it seems, have not realized they are being left behind by more progressive governance elsewhere,” she said.

According to Herrera-Dy, one of the immediate and biggest impacts of natural calamities, such as the recent eruption of the Taal Volcano is the interruption to power and communications.

The lawmaker said in order for the affected communities to better cope with the disaster and recover faster, the continuous supply of power is critical.

“The painful and ugly sight of those power and communications cables, and service posts collapsing because of the weight of wet volcanic ash in Batangas and Cavite reminded me of House Bill 5845, which proposes a nationwide underground cable system,” she added.

With the Taal Volcano eruption, Metro Manila, Tagaytay City, Lipa City and Batangas City now have more reason to bury those cables underground, said Herrera-Dy.

“They need not wait for the national government to enact a law. They simply have to conduct feasibility studies and enact local ordinances, and look for funding outside of their annual budgets. The cities can bid out, or invite private investors, to lay the cables underground. In biddings, they would use LGU-generated funds. If they invite private investors, investors’ funds would be used,” she said.

HB 5845 mandates all companies, service providers, industries and other similar entities that use wires and/or cable, especially those that are engaged in the business of telephone, cable, Internet service and power supply to the public to relocate, and/or install, their wire and cable system underground.

“I propose that the private sector bear the full cost of the underground cable system, because the annual budget cannot bear that burden. For government to do it, there has to be affordable foreign financing from multiple sources and, possibly, the issuance of bonds—bonds like the reconstruction bonds issued after the Luzon earthquake of July 1991,” she said.

Herrera-Dy also said underground cabling can be done in phases nationwide.

“It can be a 10-year program, starting with Metro Manila, Tagaytay, Batangas City and Lipa City. Not only is underground cabling more secure from volcanic ash, strong winds and floods, it would also enhance the architectural beauty of cities and towns, make them more livable environments,” she said.

“The national government can start the ball rolling through the National Electrification Administration, implementor of the Anti-Powerline Disturbance Act. The NEA can help the LGUs by doing the feasibility studies. The Neda [National Economic and Development Authority] and Philippine Institute of Development Studies can also conduct feasibility studies as part of the current mandates and budgets,” she added.