

By MARIVIR R. MONTEBON

President, Fil-Am Press Club of New York

In a court hearing that lasted for almost three hours, a clearly exasperated Judge Barbara Jaffe ordered the Philippine Independence Day Council, Inc. (PIDCI) “to immediately hand over” certified records of finance reports, ledgers, balance sheets, statement of profit and loss for 2103-2017, membership lists of qualified and non-qualified voters, and minutes of Board meetings.

PIDCI legal counsel Manny Quintal told OSM!: “We will hand over what we have” after Jaffe dismissed the first hearing at Room 341 of the civil court of the New York Supreme Court on Jan. 10, 2018.

PIDCI is a not-for-profit organization which spawned from the Philippine Consulate General of New York as a heritage organization known for institutionalizing the Philippine Independence Day parade in the city every first Sunday of June.

Potential annual incomes of PIDCI are rental space of food street vendors, souvenir program/magazine, and at least two fund-raising beauty contests.

It has however failed to present audited financial reports for the past four years, causing the revocation of its 501 (c) 3 status.

The incomes from these activities are known to be staggering.

Concerned Filipino leaders are lamenting accountability and transparency from PIDCI.

During recess, lawyer Lara Gregory examined the documents presented by Quintal before the judge and said she was not satisfied with these financial and organizational documents.

Quintal had earlier noted that PIDCI no longer has the list of proxies to which the judge had noted for the petitioners can pursue an inquiry into the same.

Quintal also asked Jaffe to issue a gag order for complainants from going to the media while the case is in process.

Jaffe denied the motion, citing the 1st Amendment.

Gregory said that they will file motion for contempt if PIDCI fails to immediately produce the documents which have long been sought by the United Mindoro International represented by its president Juliet Payabyab and the Philippine Community Center Services for the Aging represented by Nieva Burdick.

Jaffe is set to hear election-related complaints on PIDCI.

The PIDCI is facing multiple petitions before the New York State Supreme Court, compelling it to produce corporate annual reports for 2013-2016, corporate financial books and records, membership list, and to nullify and order new elections.

Respondents named in the case are: Comelec chair Raul Estrellado; newly-elected president Antero Martinez; board members Joycelyn Aligarbes, Chris de Guzman, Tommy Ludena, Rely Manacay, Jojo Paredes, Mateo Reyes, Sofia Abad, Nora Galleros, Anthony Bautista, Dora Koltzidis, Vitaliano Rafael and Levi Tejada; and former president Prospero Lim.

The petitioners, the United Mindoro International and the Philippine Community Center Services for the Aging, filed the petition on Nov. 14, 2017.

(Editor's note: Marivir R. Montebon is the Publisher/Executive Editor at OSM!)