LTO TO SUE CONTRACTOR FOR DRIVER’S LICENSE ALTERATIONS

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Applicants wait for the release of their driver’s licenses at the Land Transportation Office in Quezon City. PHOTO BY MIGUEL DE GUZMAN THE Land Transportation Office (LTO) is readying charges against Amalgamated Motors Philippines Inc. (AMPI) allegedly for “tampering” government-issued drivers license cards that sowed confusion among the agency’s district offices and caused operations to stall.
AMPI won the contract for the production of license cards. The LTO had stopped releasing cards since Monday following the unauthorized release of a new design by the private company.

LTO Metro Manila head Teofilo Guadiz 3rd said that they would be filing criminal or civil cases against the firm and its officials for their unauthorized move.
“What they’ve done was tampering of public documents. We’ll leave the filing of charges to the [lawyers],” Guadiz told The Manila Times.

Guadiz also expressed concern that many of those renewing their driver’s license will have to pay fines for being late. He said AMPI should shoulder the cost because the applicants could not be blamed for the firm’s own fault.

“Walang sumasagot [Nobody answers] on the issue of penalty. The penalty is a huge amount for the masses, eh hindi nila naman kasalanan bakit sila male-late [They should not be faulted for being late],” Guadiz stressed.

He also noted that the new license would take three minutes to be processed for it has to be laminated. On the other hand, the old plastic ID takes only two minutes to process.

Expired
The LTO suspended indefinitely the issuance of driver’s licenses to applicants following the release of the new design without proper consultation with LTO officials. LTO chief Virginia Torres ordered the suspension until the issue has been resolved.

“We are now promising that it [license processing] will normalize next week. It’s our commitment the licenses would be back to its old features,” Torres told reporters.

She added that Ampi failed to inform them of its plan and failed to properly present the “redesigned features” to the LTO hierarchy and the DOTC for for approval.

For his part, Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC) Secretary Mar Roxas revealed that the contract of AMPI with the LTO had long expired since 2006. However, the LTO allowed the firm to continue.

“Sa totoo lang, hindi naman bagong impormasyon ito siguro nakalimutan lang, 2006 pa lang, expired na kontrata nito. Ayon sa mga bali-balita sa LTO nung nakaraan ay hindi ipina-bid ito, ibig sabihin ‘parang sige lang tuloy-tuloy lang (Honestly, this is not new but maybe forgotten.

As early as 2006, the contract had expired. According to those at LTO, there was no new bidding, meaning they were allowed to continue),” Roxas said.

When Jose “Ping” de Jesus was still DOTC Secretary, they decided to conduct a new bidding for the project but the AMPI secured a temporary restraining order and injunction from the Regional Trial Court (RTC).

“Dito lang sa Pilipinas na kung saan hindi ka na nanalo sa bidding, hindi ka nanalo sa paligsahan, nanalo ka sa pamamagitan ng TRO (It’s only in the Philippines that when you lost in a bidding, if you lost in a contest, you win through TRO),” he said.

Repaired
As of Thursday afternoon, Guadiz said that AMPI had repaired 11 of the 27 district offices in Metro Manila, with the corporation’s technicians reverting the ID back to its old logo.

“Mas tumagal na ang processing. Ninakawan ng AMPI ang LTO ng ilang operating hours [Processing took longer. AMPI robbed LTO of operating hours],” he further said, adding that each of the LTO offices has the capacity to cater to 300 persons per day.

Guadiz said that AMPI gave the assurance that all the computers in all LTO district offices used for the issuance of the driver’s licenses will be fully functional today.

For his part, a staunch ally of President Benigno Aquino 3rd at the House of Representatives also on Thursday said that the LTO should go back to issuing the old driver’s licenses while awaiting for the approval of the new design.

House committee on transportation vice chairman Ben Evardone of Eastern Samar said that the agency should continue issuing the old drivers’ license “pending the approval of the new design,” adding that the contractor should not have unilaterally placed a new design without any go signal from the concerned agencies.

“Ibalik na lang sa lumang design yung licenses (The old design should be returned). After all, the proper agencies such as the DOTC and the LTO should be the one initiating such changes,” Evardone said.

The lawmaker added that he would be calling the attention of all involved in the problem.
“They should explain to us what is happening because it is our right to be given such government-issued IDs,” he explained.

Miscommunication
Meanwhile, Ampi said that what happened “was a case of miscommunication” and that the proposed redesigned license was only “on a standby mode.”

Lawyer Ulpiano Madamba explained that the new design underwent strict testing and evaluation as they even hired some Chinese information technology experts to conduct a study for it.

Madamba said almost 90 percent of their system was already back on Thursday morning. He denied that they have not consulted the LTO officials as it was only“more of a system upgrade” that was gutted by a system glitch or error.

Torres also announced that they will re-implement the early warning device (EWD) requirement for motorists starting today (June 15).

She said the LTO will implement Letter of Instruction (LOI) No. 229, requiring the use of EWD on motor vehicles, except for motorcycles. Torres clarified that EWDs are now mandatory vehicle accessories and a requirement for vehicle registration. They will have to be presented upon demand by any LTO deputized law enforcer nationwide during apprehension.

“A pair of EWD shall be a required motor vehicle accessory that shall be carried at all times and presented by the driver or operator upon demand by LTO deputized law enforcer when apprehended for another offense,” Torres told the Times.

With a report from Jing Villamente