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LEGISLATION

Lawmakers' performance in bill deliberation criticized

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Civil society groups have expressed frustration over the perceived poor performance of House of Representatives members, demanding the lawmakers put aside political interests in their legislative duties.

Indonesian Parliament Watch (Formappi) said the lawmakers had been slow in deliberating bills and that it was pessimistic that lawmakers would improve before the end of their 2014-2019 term, particularly because their work target was not realistic.

For 2018, the House has set a target to pass of 51 priority bills.

"With too many political interests and strong intervention from political parties in bill deliberation, it takes time for the House to pass bills," Formappi researcher Lucius Karus told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday.

He was speaking in response to the House's fourth sitting period, which recently ended and during which it did not pass any bills into law. During the sitting period, from March 5 to April 26, lawmakers passed only two bills to ratify a defense cooperation agreement between Indonesia and Thailand and a protocol to implement a sixth package of commitments on finance services under the ASEAN framework.

No bill listed on the priority list

of the National Legislation Program (Prolegnas), including the terrorism bill and the Criminal Code amendment, was endorsed as targeted.

Lucius said if the House wanted to heed people's wish for them to perform better, they could start by rearranging the list of priority bills and setting a more realistic target.

The recently ended sitting period had a lower outcome than previous ones. In the first sitting period of 2017-2018, which ran from Aug. 16 through Oct. 27, 2017, the House passed only the migrant workers protection bill.

In the following sitting period, from Nov. 15 to Dec. 13, the lawmakers passed only the Indonesian Red Cross bill.

During the third sitting period, from Jan. 9 to Feb. 11, the House focused solely on endorsing the Legislative Institutions Law (MD3), making it the only bill to be passed in that period. The lawmakers sped up deliberation of the MD3 Law because it afforded additional seats, comprising one House deputy speaker and three People's Consultative Assembly deputy speakers.

The seemingly lackluster performance contradicts House Speaker Bambang Soesatyo's statement during a plenary meeting on Thursday, when he said, "Preparations for the 2018 regional elections and 2019 legislative and presidential elections will not disrupt the work of legislators."



The House has only one more sitting period for 2017-2018, which starts on May 18. Bambang said, however, that lawmakers would focus on deliberating the draft 2019 state budget bill, in which they have proposed a Rp 2 trillion (US\$144.3 million) allocation increase to construct a new building and renovate their offices.

For 2019, the House Legislative Body (Baleg) proposed a Rp 7.7 trillion allocation, far higher than Rp 5.7 trillion it received in 2018.

The Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (Fitra) has also criticized the House, saying its poor performance was not in line with its aggressive demand for more funds.

“The House should be ashamed for asking for an increase in

funds,” Fitra researcher Gunardi said recently.

He further said the implication of some lawmakers in criminal cases, including corruption, had tainted the House’s image, not to mention the fact that its speaker had been changed three times in four years.

Gerindra Party lawmaker Muhammad Syafi’i said it was not the elections that had disrupted the House’s legislative performance but the political dynamics.

“We often take hours and even days to discuss only one sentences in an article, pending deliberation again and again until we reach one voice. That takes time. But that’s how we produce a law with good quality. It’s not only about the quantity,” said Syafi’i.