

Judul : Lawmakers' Monthly Housing Allowance causes Controversy
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Lawmakers' monthly housing allowance causes controversy

Critics say policy adds to burden on state budget

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A new policy offering newly inaugurated lawmakers a monthly housing allowance of tens of millions rupiah has caused a stir.

The House of Representatives secretariat general has decided to stop directly providing housing for the body's 580 lawmakers and will offer them a monthly accommodation allowance instead.

The decision was signed by House secretary-general Indra Iskandar on Sept. 25, before the inauguration of the new lawmakers. But the policy was only announced to the public last week, just as lawmakers elected in February's legislative election, many of whom are incumbents, started their tenure.

Indra said all members of the House had been ordered to vacate their official residences at the Kalibata housing complex in South Jakarta by the end of October at the latest because many of the houses were no longer livable.

The House secretariat general will then return the properties, which were constructed in

the 80s, to the Finance Ministry, which manages state assets.

On Monday, Indra noted that "only 45 percent of the 596 buildings at the House of Representatives official housing complex in Kalibata, South Jakarta, are livable", *kompas.com* reported.

He said lawmakers often complained of rats and leaks in the ceilings and walls during the rainy season.

Indra said another reason for the new policy was that in the past, many lawmakers, particularly those from Jakarta, did not actually reside in Kalibata. They preferred to live in their private homes and had staff members live in their official residences instead.

The size of the new monthly housing allowance remains unclear, but reports suggested that each member of the House would receive around Rp 50 million (US\$3,194), roughly ten times Jakarta's minimum wage.

If the monthly figure is correct, the state will spend Rp 348 billion annually to pay for lawmakers' lodging.

The new policy has sparked

criticism from activists and member of the public, who say the allowance will add to the burden on state coffers.

Critics said the policy was insensitive to the public, considering that many citizens were struggling to afford housing amid the current economic downturn.

"The problem is lawmakers choose to spend that much money for themselves when, in reality, the majority of people they're representing are still struggling economically," Lucius Karus of Indonesian Parliament Watch (Formappi) said in a statement on Wednesday.

Noting that the damage in the Kalibata housing complex was mostly minor and could easily be repaired, Indra said lawmakers had used the policy as an excuse to bump up their incomes so that they could enjoy luxurious lifestyles.

"What's more annoying is that lawmakers asked for this new allowance before they even began their tenure. They have not even started to work for the people and they're already asked for a lot [of money]," Lucius said.

Some social media users questioned the logic behind House's decision.

"If lawmakers' official residences are deemed no longer inhabitable, how about [run-down] homes of people in remote areas?" an X user said.

Seira Tamara of Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) said the new scheme was prone to misuse.

"The fact that the allowance money will be wired directly to the personal accounts of lawmakers will make it hard to monitor whether the money will be used for paying housing bills or not," she said on Thursday.

ICW demanded that the House secretariat general revoke the decision and return to the initial policy of assigning Kalibata properties to lawmakers after renovating the houses in a transparent manner.

The idea to ditch the Kalibata housing complex had been touted by lawmakers since 2014 but had never come to fruition.

In 2011, the House came under criticism when its secretariat spent around Rp 430 billion to repair 516 houses in the complex. (ipa)