

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 625



Introduced by Honorable Kimi S. Cojuangco

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to establish the Foreign Students Office to promote local education and tourism to foreign students and appropriate funds therefor.

Equally important, the Foreign Students Office is meant to accelerate, simplify and do away with all the red tape foreign students must go through to be issued a student visa.

Most, if not all foreign students complain about the procedure of applying for a student's visa. One of their major issues is the lack of information when starting their application. After submitting the initial requirements, they are asked to submit even more documents, forcing them to travel to different offices. Once these additional documents are submitted, they are told more documents are needed, again forcing them to go out and collect the additional requirements. They are forced to continue doing this until the documents are complete, which should not be the case. Once a student applies for a Visa, he or she should be informed of all the requirements needed for the Visa. Having this information from the start saves them time and energy in collecting the needed documents. Another issue is the lack of basic courtesy of the concerned personnel. A lot of times the personnel is unhelpful and unaccommodating, which is a total disregard of the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees. Being new to the country, foreign students should be met with proper guidance to ease the transition.

Such an ordeal makes the student's first weeks in the Philippines unbearable, often leaving a negative image before even getting the chance

1 to experience what the country has to offer. These students chose to
2 study in the Philippines yet they are met with difficulties from the
3 moment they arrive. Simplifying the process of applying for student visas
4 will encourage more students to study here. Why should we deny them
5 that? If things are not fixed, foreigners might think twice about studying
6 here, and that will be a loss for our country.

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8 The Philippines has been constantly striving to position itself as the
9 premier destination for learning in the Asia-Pacific Region since the year
10 2000. The country's strategic location, affordability and quality of
11 education, and proficiency in the English language define our advantage
12 over other Asian countries. Also, a number of prestigious Philippine
13 universities have made their mark as centers of academic excellence in
14 Asia, particularly the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila
15 University, De La Salle University and the University of Santo Tomas.
16 This further proves that the country provides state-of-the-art educational
17 aids and technologies deemed significant in the pursuit of scholastic
18 excellence.

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20 Consequently, foreign students from Southeast Asia, South Korea,
21 China, India, Turkey and the Middle East prefer the Philippines for their
22 technical, tertiary and continuing education. Today, a great number of
23 bright young minds from all over the world contribute to the medley of
24 cultures in the Philippines.

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26 Education tourism, a trend where people travel to foreign locations
27 and enroll in short-term or degree courses while they get to know the
28 culture and history of its people, is now one of the fastest growing areas
29 of the economy. Education tourism has reached significant magnitudes
30 of late, with almost 20,000 foreign students enrolled in degree courses as
31 of March 2011, according to the Bureau of Immigration. This does not
32 include the tens of thousands enrolled in small institutions offering short
33 courses for personal enrichment or entrepreneurial use.

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35 Accordingly, the government must provide measures to ensure that
36 foreign students receive high-quality education in a safe, positive
37 environment and to encourage them to immerse themselves into the rich
38 Filipino way of life. The salient feature of the bill is the creation of the
39 Foreign Students Office which shall guarantee the development of
40 education tourism in the country through strong collaboration and
41 increased linkages between the various industry sectors. Through the
42 Office, the country shall produce a workable education program that also
43 promotes the magnificence of the Philippines as a tourist destination.

1 The country could attain the status as a center for excellence in
2 Asia by instituting measures to further promote education tourism in the
3 country. Providing programs along this line will not only provide foreign
4 students the opportunity to acquire quality education but also to
5 experience a multiplicity of landscapes and rich cultural environment in
6 the Philippines, one of the most vibrant nations in the world. A further
7 increase in the number of foreign enrollees will certainly boost our
8 country's economy and further enhance its good reputation as a premier
9 tourist destination.

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11 In view of the foregoing, approval of this bill is earnestly sought.
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17 **HON. KIMI S. COJUANGCO**
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17 **AN ACT**
18 **ESTABLISHING THE FOREIGN STUDENTS OFFICE TO PROMOTE**
19 **LOCAL EDUCATION AND TOURISM AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS**
20 **THEREFOR**
21

22 *Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in*
23 *Congress assembled:*
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25 SECTION 1. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of
26 the State to establish the Philippines as center for education in the Asia-Pacific
27 Region by encouraging foreign students to avail of affordable and quality
28 education while, at the same time, promoting the country as a primary tourist
29 destination. Toward this end, the State shall institute measures to ensure that
30 foreign students receive high quality education in a safe environment and help
31 boost the nation's prospects to improve its economic situation.

32 SEC. 2. *Foreign Students Office.* – The Foreign Students Office,
33 hereinafter referred to as the Office, is hereby established to develop plans and
34 programs for the promotion of local education and tourism services to foreign
35 students. The Office shall be under the supervision of the Office of the President
36 of the Philippines.
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1 SEC. 3. *Duties and Functions.* – The Foreign Students Office shall
2 exercise the following duties and functions:

3 a. Formulate the Education Tourism Plan which shall be the basis of the
4 policies and programs to assure maximum and efficient utilization of all resources
5 toward achieving the objectives of this Act;

6 b. Promote through public information, education and cultural-education
7 exchange, in coordination with other relevant government agencies, non-
8 governmental organizations and the private sector, the Philippines as a preferred
9 choice for technical, tertiary and continuing education;

10 c. Coordinate with accredited higher educational institutions, similar
11 institutions and centers on their curricula to offer foreign students a wide selection
12 of options for completing their technical, tertiary or continuing education in the
13 country, particularly to include touristy activities in such programs;

14 d. Coordinate with the Department of Tourism the activities and
15 programs to encourage foreign students to come to the country for them to fully
16 appreciate and understand the Filipinos' rich cultural heritage;

17 e. Encourage the participation of non-governmental organizations
18 (NGOs), people's organizations (POs) and the private sector in initiating programs
19 for the development of education tourism;

20 f. Promulgate simplified procedures and implementing guidelines, in
21 coordination with the Bureau of Immigration, to ensure that efficient service is
22 extended to foreign students who seek temporary stay in the Philippines for the
23 purpose of taking a course in the technical, tertiary or continuing education levels;

24 g. Formulate strategic interventions and provide expeditious response to
25 address the immediate concerns of foreign students;

26 h. Provide an aggressive marketing campaign for education tourism;

1 i. Ensure collaboration and network development between the education
2 and tourism industries to identify and immediately address gaps in the
3 implementation of programs and this Act;

4 j. Provide avenues for exchange of information, exchange programs and
5 sharing of ideas on issues relating to education tourism;

6 k. Provide training workshops that could educate and unite local tourism
7 and educational providers at the community and regional levels;

8 l. Monitor and coordinate the implementation of the provisions of this
9 Act with the department and agencies concerned;

10 m. Perform such other functions as may be necessary to implement the
11 purposes of this Act.

12 SEC. 4. ***Executive Director and Secretariat.*** – The Office shall be
13 headed by an Executive Director who shall be appointed by the President of the
14 Philippines. The Office shall have a technical secretariat which shall provide the
15 necessary technical management and staff services.

16 SEC. 5. ***Inter-Government Cooperation.*** – Any government office or
17 agency shall, upon the request of the Foreign Students Office, provide technical
18 assistance, furnish such data, reports and other information, not otherwise
19 prohibited by law, necessary to carry out the objectives of this Act.

20 SEC. 6. ***Education Tourism Plan.*** – In formulating the Education
21 Tourism Plan (ETP), the Foreign Students Office shall take into account the
22 national tourism action plan prepared by the Department of Tourism pursuant to
23 Republic Act No. 9593, otherwise known as the “*Philippine Tourism Act.*”

24 The Office shall, in coordination with other concerned agencies,
25 continuously update the existing Education Tourism Plan in view of evolving
26 trends, needs and capabilities of the education tourism industry in the country.

1 Within sixty (60) days after the effectivity of this Act and every two (2)
2 years thereafter, the Office shall submit the ETP to both the Senate and the House
3 of Representatives which shall contain the following information:

- 4 a. The current status of education tourism and its determinants;
- 5 b. Assessment of past developments, problems and challenges;
- 6 c. Goals, strategies and policies for the coming year; and
- 7 d. Recommendations to further promote the development of the education
8 tourism industry in the country.

9 **SEC. 7. *Entry and Stay of Foreign Students.*** – All foreign students
10 seeking to enter and stay in the Philippines solely for the purpose of taking up a
11 technical, tertiary or continuing learning course, including foreigners who are
12 already in the Philippines with a valid visa who wish to study in the country, must
13 first secure a temporary visitor's or student visa, whichever is applicable, in
14 accordance with Commonwealth Act No. 613 or the *Philippine Immigration Act*
15 and Executive Order No. 423, entitled "*Guidelines Governing The Entry And Stay*
16 *Of Foreign Students In The Philippines And The Establishment Of An Inter-Agency*
17 *Committee On Foreign Students For the Purpose,*" as amended. All applications
18 for student visa shall be approved within thirty (30) days after the submission of all
19 the necessary requirements by the higher education institution to the Department of
20 Foreign Affairs.

21 **SEC. 8. *Accreditation Procedures.*** – All higher education institutions
22 (HEIs) or similar institutions and centers must first secure an accreditation from
23 the Office before being authorized to accept foreign students. For this purpose, the
24 Office shall coordinate with the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the
25 Philippines, CHED and TESDA. The Office shall prepare every year an updated
26 list of such accredited schools, copies of which shall be furnished the Bureau of
27 Immigration, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), National Bureau of

Investigation (NBI), the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) and the schools authorized to admit foreign students.

SEC. 9. ***Assistance to Foreign Students.*** – All HEI's or similar institutions and centers accredited to accept foreign students shall establish a Foreign Student Unit within their organization to assist such foreign students with any concerns regarding their education and learning needs.

The Bureau of Immigration shall likewise establish a Foreign Student Desk to assist such foreign students where their respective visas are concerned.

SEC. 10. ***Reports.*** – All accredited HEIs or similar institutions and centers shall submit a report to the Office every year, copies of which shall be furnished the CHED and the BI, to contain the following:

a. Enrollment data on foreign students, including the names of those who have been accepted but failed to enroll;

b. Data on missing students, transferees, drop-outs or those with derogatory record; and

c. Information on the promotion to higher course levels, to include those who failed the course.

Failure to submit the above required report shall be a ground for cancellation by the Office of the accreditation and authority to admit foreign students.

SEC. 11. ***International Accreditation.*** – The Office shall, in coordination with the Commission on Higher Education, assist HEIs or similar institutions and centers to acquire accreditation from foreign countries to further enhance their competitiveness. Toward this end, the Office shall conduct consultations with foreign education accreditation agencies to facilitate the accreditation of the country's HEIs or similar institutions and centers.

SEC. 12. ***Penalty.*** – Any higher educational institution or similar institution or center which has been found, after due investigation by the Office, to have

1 violated any provision of this Act or its implementing rules and regulations shall
2 suffer the penalty of cancellation of the authority to admit foreign students.

3 SEC. 13. ***Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within sixty (60) days
4 from the effectivity of this Act, the Chairperson of the Commission on Higher
5 Education shall, in coordination with the Department of Tourism and the Bureau of
6 Immigration, formulate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective
7 implementation of this Act.

8 SEC. 14. ***Appropriations.*** – The amount necessary to implement the
9 provisions of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the
10 Office of the President of the Philippines. Thereafter, such sum as may be
11 necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General
12 Appropriations Act.

13 SEC. 15. ***Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, rules and regulations and other
14 issuances inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are deemed modified,
15 revoked or repealed accordingly.

16 SEC. 16. ***Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
17 publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) national newspapers of general
18 circulation.

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20 Approved,
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