

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **1492**



Introduced by Kabataan Party-list Representative Terry L. Ridon

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippine Constitution upholds the right of the people to information on matters of public concern and likewise directs the State to adopt and implement a policy of full public disclosure of all its transactions involving public interest.

While public committee meetings and hearings are common at the House of Representatives and the Senate, transparency seems to stop at the bicameral conference committee. The public is left to wait for committee reports to know what transpired during such meetings. Critics have often dubbed the bicameral conference meeting as Congress' 'third chamber' – a secluded meeting wherein contentious provisions are inserted without the benefit of public scrutiny.

Time and again, the public has witnessed how secretive bicameral conference meetings have hampered public participation, and resulted to laws such as Republic Act No. 10175 or the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, which contain insertions that have rendered discussions in the august halls of Congress futile, and even endangered our people's fundamental rights. Haphazard last-minute additions, especially in the annual General Appropriations Bill, have also resulted to various anomalies, including 'double insertions' and other nefarious acts that are eventually passed into law.

The practice of closed door bicameral conference meetings must not only be stopped – it is incumbent upon Congress to conduct these sessions in an open and transparent manner.

In the light of the foregoing, we refile our bill – originally proposed under the 15th Congress by former Kabataan Party-list representative Raymond V. Palatino and former Bayan Muna Party-list representative Teddy A. Casiño – that mandates all bicameral committee meetings be made public.

Congress is conferred with the power to create legislation. Laws are part of the basic institutions of a society as these legislations define rules on a person's rights and

obligations, penalties for violating these rules, taxation and appropriating funds, and define what to expect from the State. The impact of the creation of rules that govern society is a major public concern and therefore requires the active participation of citizens.

The approval of this bill is earnestly and urgently sought.



HON. TERRY L. RIDON
Representative, Kabataan Party-list

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AN ACT
MANDATING ALL BICAMERAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS BE CONDUCTED IN AN
OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MANNER

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress
assembled:*

1 **SECTION 1. Short Title.** This Act shall be known as the "Bicameral Meeting
2 Transparency Act of 2013".

3 **SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy.** It is the policy of the state to create legislation
4 within the framework of accountability, transparency, stability, performance and participation.
5 The State shall encourage, guarantee and sustain transparency, involvement and
6 participation of the people in the processes of legislation.

7 **SECTION 3. Conduct of the Bicameral Meeting.** The House of Representatives,
8 the Senate of the Philippines shall comply with the following rules in the conduct of the
9 bicameral meetings:

10 (1) The names of the members of the bicameral conference committee, immediately
11 after appointment of committee members, shall be published on the website of
12 both houses of Congress and published in two (2) top major newspapers and two
13 (2) tabloids, in terms of readership.

14 (2) The meetings and sessions shall be open to the public. The date and venue of

1 the bicameral conference committee shall be published on the website of both
2 houses of Congress and published in two (2) top major newspapers and two (2)
3 tabloids, in terms of readership at least 3 days before the scheduled meeting.

4 (3) Private citizens, representatives of civil society organizations, and other
5 interested groups are allowed to observe the meetings and sessions of the
6 bicameral conference committee. Private citizens, representatives of civil society
7 organizations, and other interested groups may be invited to be present but such
8 invitation shall not be a requirement for entry.

9 (4) The meetings and sessions shall be recorded and the official minutes of the
10 meeting shall be made immediately available to the public. The record of the
11 minutes of the deliberations shall be immediately posted on the website of both
12 houses of Congress and published in two (2) top major newspapers and two (2)
13 tabloids, in terms of readership.

14 (5) Members of both chambers of Congress that are not appointed members of the
15 bicameral conference committee may attend meetings of the said committee.
16 With the consent of the Chair of the bicameral conference committee,
17 congressmen and senators that are not members of the bicameral conference
18 committee may be allowed to participate in the discussion, but may not be
19 allowed to vote.

20 (6) The media shall be invited to the meetings and sessions of the bicameral
21 conference committee.

22 **SECTION 4. *Amendments to the Bill.*** In the instance amendments to the bill are
23 introduced or requested by a member of either Senate or House of Representatives, such
24 amendments shall be referenced via a footnote that indicates the author of the proposed
25 amendment, the date on which the amendments were proposed, and a brief explanation for
26 the proposal.

27 **SECTION 5. *Separability Clause.*** If any part or provision of this Act is held

1 unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions thereof which are not affected thereby shall
2 continue to be in full force and effect.

3 **SECTION 6. *Repealing Clause.*** All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations or
4 other issuances or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby
5 repealed or modified accordingly.

6 **SECTION 7. *Effectivity.*** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
7 publication in two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,