

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Manila

FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 2831



Introduced by **HONORABLE ROSE MARIE 'BABY' J. ARENAS**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Corruption remains to be the major hindrance in the development and progress of our nation. More importantly, the integrity and trustworthiness of our government will continue to be questioned until this perennial problem is finally resolved.

The difficulty in combating corruption lies in its very nature of being committed behind closed doors and well beyond the purview of the public eye. This is where the importance of obtaining credible witnesses, with reliable information regarding the corrupt practices of government officials or employees comes into place.

This proposed legislation seeks to encourage whistleblowers to come into the open and put an end to the corrupt acts of these government officials and employees. At the same time, it aims to strengthen the present machinery in ensuring the full protection and security of these brave witnesses against any form of retaliation or ostracism. A rewards and benefits system will also be established in order to ensure the livelihood and welfare of these whistleblowers.

In order, however, to protect the public, a rigid procedure will also be enforced in order to prevent any abuse of the provisions of this Act as well as to prevent false testimonies that will only wreck more havoc into our society.

In view of the above premises, the immediate approval of this bill is urgently sought.


ROSE MARIE 'BABY' J. ARENAS

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Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE ROSE MARIE 'BABY' J. ARENAS**

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR PROTECTION, SECURITY AND BENEFITS
OF WHISTLEBLOWERS AND OTHER PURPOSES

Be enacted by the House of the Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Section 1. ***Title of the Act.*** – This Act shall be known as the “Whistleblower Act of 2013”.

Section 2. ***Declaration of Policy.*** – Public office is a public trust. It is the policy of the State to promote and ensure full accountability in the conduct of its officers and employees, and exact full retribution from those who shall engage in grant and corrupt practices. Towards this end, the State shall;

- a. Maintain honest and high standards of integrity in the public service;
- b. Safeguard the national interest through the prosecution of corrupt and erring public officials and employees; and
- c. Encourage and facilitate the disclosure of corrupt conduct and practices in the public service by providing benefits and protection to whistleblowers.

Nothing in this Act shall diminish or restrict the entitlement, receipt or enjoyment by a whistleblower or an informant of more or higher benefits provided under existing laws.

Section 3. ***Definition of Terms.*** – As used in this Act, the following terms shall mean:

- a. "Acts constituting graft and corruption" shall mean any conduct, act or omission of public officers and employees solely, or in cooperation or conspiracy with private persons, which are covered by, or constitute as violations of the laws enumerated in Section 4 of this Act;
- b. "Employee" shall mean any person who is made to suffer work by, or who renders service for, an employer. The term shall include public officers and employees as defined in this Act as well as any person considered an employee under the Labor Code;
- c. "Employer" shall mean any individual, partnership, association, corporation or entity, including the government, or any person or group of persons who shall directly or indirectly, for or on behalf of said individual, partnership, association, corporation or entity, employs an employee as defined in this Act;
- d. "Government" includes the National Government, and any of its subdivisions, agencies or instrumentalities, including government owned and controlled corporations and their subsidiaries, and the local government units;
- e. "Whistleblower" shall refer to an informant or any person who has privileged or personal knowledge or access to data, events or information and who shall deliberately disclose any individual, collective, or organized conduct of any public officer/s and employees constituting graft and corruption as defined under this Act;
- f. "Public officer" shall refer to any person holding any public office in the Government of the Republic of the Philippines by virtue of an appointment, election or contract;
- g. "Retaliatory action" shall refer to any negative or obstructive response, reaction or reprisal to the disclosure made under this Act aimed at, pertaining to, or against a whistleblower or an informant or any of the members of his/her family and relatives up to the fourth civil degree of consanguinity or affinity. Said action shall include criminal, civil or administrative proceedings commenced or pursued against said whistleblower or any member of his family or relative up to the second degree of consanguinity or affinity, as well as any retaliatory action in the workplace;
- h. "Retaliatory action in the workplace" shall refer to any discriminatory conduct or policy which affects the promotion or job assignment, including undue negative performance appraisal, close monitoring by supervisors, unwarranted criticism or avoidance by co-employees, blacklisting from other job opportunities, or prejudicial transfer by reason of the disclosure made under this Act;

- i. "Qualified Whistleblower" shall mean an informant or any person qualified and admitted into the Whistleblowers' Protection Program of the Office of the Ombudsman in accordance with this Act and its rules and regulations.

Section 4. **Coverage.** – Conduct constituting graft and corruption, whether or not commenced or consummated before the effectivity of this Act, shall mean any conduct, act or omission of public officers and employees solely, or in cooperation or conspiracy with private person/s, which are covered by, or amount to violations of:

1. Presidential Decree No. 46;
2. Republic Act No. 3019;
3. Republic Act No. 6713;
4. Republic Act No. 7080; and
5. Titles II and VII of Book 2 of the Revised Penal Code.

Section 5. **Admission to the Program.** - Whistleblowers or informants, whether from the public or private sector, shall be entitled to the benefits under this Act, provided that all the following requisites concur:

- a. The disclosure is voluntary, in writing and under oath;
- b. The disclosure relates to conduct constituting graft and corruption under this Act;
- c. The disclosure is not yet subject of a complaint filed with the Office of the Ombudsman or investigated by any other investigating agency, unless in the opinion of the Ombudsman, such a disclosure is necessary for an effective and successful investigation or prosecution, or essential for the acquisition of material evidence not in its possession;
- d. The information given by the whistleblower can be corroborated; and
- e. The information disclosed leads to the successful gathering of evidence and/or conduct of investigation sufficient to sustain a finding of probable cause for the filing of a criminal complaint or information before a court of competent jurisdiction.

Section 6. **Necessary of Testimony.** - The testimony of the whistleblower in court shall not be necessary for the entitlement or enjoyment of the benefits of this Act. In the event that the Whistleblower's testimony is required as found by the Office of the Ombudsman, to be necessary and indispensable for the

successful prosecution of a case, he shall be entitled to the additional benefits and protection under Republic Act No. 6981 otherwise known as the *Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Act*.

Section 7. *Memorandum of Agreement with the Person to be Protected.*

- Before the person is provided protection as a whistleblower or informant of the State, he shall first execute a Memorandum of Agreement which shall set forth his/her responsibilities including the following;

- a. To provide information to and testify before all appropriate law enforcement officials concerning any proceeding in connection with or arising from the activities involved in the offense subject matter thereof;
- b. To avoid the commission of a crime;
- c. To take all necessary precautions to avoid detection by others of the facts concerning the protection provided him under this Act;
- d. To cooperate with respect to all reasonable requests of officers and employees of the government who are providing him/her protection under this Act; and
- e. To regularly inform the appropriate program official of his current activities and address.

Section 8. *Breach of Memorandum of Agreement.* - Substantial breach of the Memorandum of Agreement shall be ground for the termination of the protection provided under this Act; Provided, however, that before terminating the same, the Ombudsman shall send notice to the whistleblower concerned, stating therein the reason for such termination. Reasonable time shall be afforded the informant to take appropriate and necessary measures for his/her protection and security in view thereof.

Section 9. *Protection Against Other Actions.* - A whistleblower or any person who has made a disclosure under this Act, shall not be subject to any liability, whether administrative, civil, criminal or other proceedings for making such disclosure or acts in relation thereto. No action, claim or demand may be taken against a whistleblower for making such disclosure nor shall any evidence presented be used against him in court and other administrative or quasi-judicial agency/body.

This protection shall also operate as immunity in favor of a whistleblower or informant against any action or proceeding taken against him/her by any person subject to disclosure, by reason thereof and acts in relation to the subject of disclosure.

Section 10. ***Defense of Privileged Communication.*** - A whistleblower or any person who has made a disclosure under this Act shall have, as defense in any other inquiry or proceeding, the absolute privilege with respect to the subject matter of his/her disclosure or information given to the proper authorities.

Section 11. ***Confidentiality.*** - Except insofar as allowed by this Act, during and after the disclosure and throughout and after any proceeding taken thereafter, the whistleblower or an informant shall be entitled to absolute confidentiality as to:

- a. His identity;
- b. The subject matter of his disclosure; and
- c. The person to whom such disclosure was made.

There shall be no such confidentiality in his/her identity if a whistleblower or an informant makes a public disclosure of a conduct constituting graft and corruption as defined in this Act unless, notwithstanding such public disclosure, he/she has taken means and measures obviously intended to preserve his/her anonymity.

Section 12. ***No Breach of Duty of Confidentiality.*** - An informant who has made a disclosure under this Act on whom provision of law, regulation, issuance, practice or other convention, imposes upon him/her a duty to maintain confidentiality with respect to any information disclosed, is considered not to have committed a breach thereof.

Section 13. ***Confidential Information.*** - No person to whom a disclosure has been made or referred shall disclose any information that may identify or tend to identify a whistleblower or informant or reveal the subject matter of such disclosure, except only as to the following circumstances:

- a. The whistleblower consents in writing prior to the disclosure of an information;
- b. The disclosure is indispensable and essential as determined by the Office of the Ombudsman, having regard to the necessary proceedings to be taken after the disclosure; or
- c. The disclosure or referral is made pursuant to an obligation under this Act.

The prohibition on disclosure under this Section shall apply to any person who has become privy to any confidential information, whether officially or by other means.

Section 14. ***Protection against Disciplinary Actions or Reprisals.*** - A whistleblower or a person who has made or is believed or suspected to have

made a disclosure under this Act is not liable to disciplinary action for making said disclosure.

Prohibited acts under this section include retaliatory action in the workplace or prejudicial conduct towards the whistleblower, such as discriminatory action behind policies and procedures, reprimand or punitive transfer, unwarranted referral to a psychiatrist or counselor, and undue poor performance reviews. Other prejudicial conducts include obstruction of an investigation, withdrawal of essential resources, undue reports and the attachment of unfair personnel file notes.

To this end, any employer who shall discourage and impose sanctions or reprisals based on workplace interaction, which shall include workplace ostracism, questions and attacks on motives, accusations of disloyalty and dysfunction, public humiliation, and the denial of work or promotion, or who encourages, causes or does retaliatory action or reprisal against an informant or anyone believed or suspected to be one shall be liable for an offense defined under this Act.

Any employee who refuses to follow orders of employers that would cause them to violate any provision of this Act shall likewise be protected from reprisals and retaliatory action in the workplace.

For purposes of this protection, an applicant for employment shall be deemed an employee and entitled to such protection.

Provided however, that an employer of a whistleblower shall be notified through a certification issued by the Office of the Ombudsman, within a period of thirty (30) days from the date when the informant last reported for work. Provided further that an employer shall have the option to remove such whistleblower from employment after securing a clearance from the Office of the Ombudsman or the Department of Labor and Employment in case of a prolonged absence due to transfer or permanent relocation under this Act or R.A. No. 6891.

Section 15. ***Security and Protection of a Whistleblower.*** - When determined to be necessary and appropriate by the Office of the Ombudsman, a whistleblower, even if the disclosure is made in confidence, shall be entitled to personal security. Should, at anytime, the identity of the informant be revealed, or his anonymity compromised, the whistleblower shall, in addition to the other benefits under this Act, and when warranted, be entitled to the benefits of R. A. No. 6981.

Section 16. ***Confidentiality of the Proceedings.*** - All proceedings involving application and/or enjoyment of the benefits under this Act, under the Office of the Ombudsman, including any action taken thereon, shall be confidential in nature. No information or documents given or submitted in support thereof shall be released except upon written order of the Office of the

Ombudsman, and provided such disclosure shall not endanger the life of a qualified whistleblower.

Section 17. **Financial Rewards for Informants.** - The whistleblower shall be entitled to a corresponding monetary reward in accordance with the provisions of this Act and its implementing rules and regulations.

The whistleblower or informant shall receive an amount in accordance with the following schedule;

Salary Grade of the Most Senior Respondent	Financial Reward of Qualified Whistleblower (<i>in Pesos</i>)
33	5,000,000.00
32	4,000,000.00
31	3,000,000.00
30	2,500,000.00
29	2,000,000.00
28	1,500,000.00
27	1,000,000.00
26	900,000.00
24-25	800,000.00
22-23	700,000.00
20-21	600,000.00
18-19	500,000.00
16-17	400,000.00
14-15	300,000.00
12-13	200,000.00
10-11	100,000.00
5-9	75,000.00
1-4	50,000.00

Upon being qualified as a whistleblower and admitted to the program by the Office of the Ombudsman, fifty percent (50%) of the reward shall be given to the qualified whistleblower. The remaining fifty percent (50%) shall be given prior to the filing of a case in a proper court.

For cases not susceptible to pecuniary estimation, such as plunder, forfeiture of ill gotten wealth, bribery, malversation and damage or injury to government, the whistleblower shall be entitled to an additional reward of ten percent (10%) of the amount recovered by final judgment.

During the pendency of the case, however, a whistleblower shall be advanced the amount equivalent to not less than twenty five percent (25%) of the additional reward of the total award due consistent with the nature of the case and the amount involved and deemed recoverable. This shall be given in accordance with the rules and regulations implementing this Act.

Section 18. **Abstract.** - All government agencies, offices, bureaus and local government units, including government-owned and -controlled corporations, whether or not with original charters, shall conspicuously display an abstract of this Act and the rights and protections of whistleblowers, including the obligations of employers under this Act. Such abstract shall be provided in the rules and regulations.

All government agencies, offices, bureaus and local government units, including government-owned and -controlled corporations, whether or not with original charters, are likewise required to put in place internal procedures for dealing with whistleblowers, consistent with the provisions of this Act and its rules and regulations. Said internal procedure shall be widely disseminated to all employees.

Section 19. **Credibility of Informant.** - In all cases, the fact of the entitlement of the qualified whistleblower or informant to the protection and benefits provided in this Act shall not be admissible in evidence to diminish or affect his credibility.

Section 20. **Penalty For Retaliatory Acts Against A Whistleblower.** - A fine of not more than One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php100,000.00) or imprisonment of not less than six (6) months but not more than six (6) years or both at the discretion of the court, and in case of a public officer or employee, the penalty of perpetual disqualification from holding public office, shall be imposed on any person who commits any of the retaliatory acts as defined in this Act against a qualified whistleblower or informant and/or hinders, delays, prevents or dissuades said whistleblower or informant, from doing the acts enumerated hereunder:

- (a) Attending, assisting or testifying before any investigating agency or quasi-judicial body or judicial;
- (b) Reporting to a law enforcement officer or judge the commission or possible commission of an offense, or a violation of conditions of probation, parole, or release pending judicial proceedings;
- (c) Seeking the arrest of another person in connection with the offense;
- (d) Causing a criminal prosecution, or a proceeding for the revocation of a parole or probation; and
- (e) Performing and enjoying the rights and benefits under this Act or attempt to do so.

Section 21. **Violation of Confidentiality.** - Any person who violates the protection of confidentiality of a protected disclosure under Sections 10, 11, 12,

and 15 of this Act, shall suffer the penalty of not more than six (6) years but not less than six (6) months with an accessory penalty of temporary absolute disqualification for public office in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to indemnify the informant in such amount of damages as may be awarded and deemed reasonable by a competent court.

Section 22. ***Retaliatory Action in the Workplace.*** - Any person who violates the protection of confidentiality of a protected disclosure under Section 10, 11, 12 and 15 of this Act, shall suffer the penalty of not more than six (6) months with an accessory penalty of temporary absolute disqualification for public office in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to indemnify a whistleblower in such amount of damages as may be awarded by a competent court.

Toward this end, the aggrieved whistleblower shall be entitled to the provisional remedy of injunction against any retaliatory action in the workplace, prejudicial conduct or discriminatory treatment by reason of the whistleblower's disclosure.

The proceedings herein shall be independent of any action that an aggrieved person may take before the Civil Service Commission or the National Labor Relations Commission, for unfair or discriminatory practices, for claims for back wages, and other labor disputes, or before other quasi-judicial agencies for any action that may or may not have arisen from a disclosure or believed or suspected disclosure.

Section 23. ***Discriminatory Hiring.*** - Any person, firm, corporation, office or employer who shall deny a qualified applicant for employment, or who shall reject his application for employment due to knowledge, belief or suspicion that the applicant is a whistleblower or informant for the State, shall be guilty of an offense and shall suffer the penalty of not more than six (6) months imprisonment with the accessory penalty of suspension of the right to hold public office in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to indemnify the informant of damages as may be awarded by a competent court.

Section 24. ***Failure of an Employer to Post Abstract.*** - The failure to post an Abstract required under Section 18 of this Act shall constitute an offense and shall be penalized with a fine in the amount of One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php100,000.00) for the first offense. The amount shall be doubled for every succeeding offense, and shall suffer an imprisonment of not more than six (6) months at the discretion of the court with the accessory penalty of suspension of the right to hold public office in case of a public officer or employee. For this purpose, the president, manager, or head of office, bureau or agency shall be held responsible for such violation.

Section 25. ***Failure to Act or Report to the Office of the Ombudsman.*** - Any person under obligation to report a disclosure under this Act to the Office of the Ombudsman, who fails to do so within the period of two (2) months, or who

fails to act thereon or cause an investigation thereof, shall be guilty of an offense and shall suffer the penalty of not more than one (1) month imprisonment, and/or a fine amounting to not more than Fifty Thousand Pesos (Php 50,000.00).

Section 26. ***False And Misleading Disclosures.*** - Any person who deliberately and voluntarily gives false or misleading information in connection with conduct

constituting graft and corruption under this Act shall, in addition to penalties under other laws, be guilty of an offense and shall suffer the penalty of imprisonment of not more than twelve (12) years and shall also suffer the penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification from holding public office in case of public officer or employee, in addition to other criminal and civil liability he may incur under existing laws.

Section 27. ***Powers and Functions of the Ombudsman.*** - In addition to its powers and functions under existing laws, the Office of the Ombudsman shall have the following powers and functions:

- (a) Supervise, monitor and coordinate all efforts relative to the implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Act;
- (b) Investigate all disclosures made under this Act and prosecute the same when warranted;
- (c) Evaluate the qualification of whistleblowers or informants for coverage within this Act, and make the appropriate decision on their entitlement to the benefits extended herein;
- (d) Undertake, in coordination and cooperation with the private and public sectors, an information campaign to educate the public on the provisions and benefits of this Act;
- (e) Develop plans and implement programs to further encourage whistleblowers or informants on graft and corrupt activities with a view to effective deterrence and/or prosecution;
- (f) Control and administer, consistent with the provisions and purpose of this Act, the protection and benefits of whistleblowers in connection with the cases within the coverage of Section 4 of this Act;
- (9) Call upon, or deputize any department, bureau, office or any other government agency or public official to assist in the effective implementation and enforcement of this Act; and
- (h) Grant immunity in accordance with the provisions of this Act and its implementing rules and regulations.

Section 28. **Implementing Rules and Regulations.** - The Office of the Ombudsman, in coordination with concerned agencies, shall promulgate such Rules and Regulations as maybe necessary to implement the intent and purposes of this Act. Said Rules and Regulations shall be published in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Section 29. **Appropriations.** - The amount of One Hundred Million Pesos (Php100,000,000.00) is hereby authorized to be appropriated out of any funds in the National Treasury not otherwise appropriated to carry into effect the purposes of this Act.

Other funding schemes or sources, subject to the limitation, shall be allowed in furtherance hereof.

Section 30. **Repealing Clause.** - All laws, decrees, executive issuances, rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 31. **Separability Clause.** - The declaration of unconstitutionality or invalidity of any provision of this Act shall not affect the other provisions hereof.

Section 32. **Effectivity Date.** - This Act shall take effect after fifteen (15) days following its publication in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,