

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5190



Introduced by Representative Kimi S. Cojuangco

EXPLANATORY NOTE

One (1) in twenty (20) preschoolers and one (1) out of every four (4) school children have an eye problem. This often goes unnoticed, especially for preschoolers, since they are used to seeing blurred images and would not complain. Without intervention, children in the early ages would suffer from visual impairment. This puts a toll on the quality of learning and the productivity of our children.

Amblyopia or lazy eye is one of the leading causes of visual impairment and blindness among children worldwide. Prevalence figures range from two (2) to five (5) percent of all children. Lazy eye is often caused by a high degree of disparity in refractive power between the eyes. The condition is treatable, with a high success rate if done before the age of 7. This declines significantly beyond that age. When the opportunity passes, amblyopic children most likely end up with permanent visual impairment. At worst, they can get blind.

It is impossible for ophthalmologists to check every child in the Philippines. To address the problem, we need a National Vision Screening at School Entry Program. Vision Screening is a fast and cost-effective means of checking children's vision. With the program, we can identify those who need to be referred to eye care professionals. Governments in many countries have implemented vision screening programs. It is time that we have our own.

Consistent with scientific literature, we should make vision screening mandatory for kindergarten pupils. This way, we are able to identify the children with lazy eye while we have the opportunity to treat them. By doing so, we also make the program cost-effective. Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial, with the Department of Education taking the lead and school teachers as frontliners. They will be the ones trained to screen pupils. The cooperation of the Department of Health and the Philippine Eye Research Institute of the National Institutes of Health, University of the Philippines Manila is crucial in developing an effective program and in continuously processing information and conducting research.

Our children deserve good eyesight and a bright future. Hence, the passage of this measure is earnestly sought.



KIMI S. COJUANGCO

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2 **House of Representatives**
3 Quezon City, Metro Manila

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9 **HOUSE BILL NO. 5190**

Introduced by Hon. Kimi S. Cojuangco

10 **AN ACT**
11 **ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL VISION SCREENING PROGRAM FOR**
12 **KINDERGARTEN PUPILS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**
13

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

16 **SECTION 1.** *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the
17 *“National Vision Screening Program Act.”*

18 **SEC. 2.** *Declaration of Policy.* – Pursuant to Article II, Section
19 15 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, it is hereby declared the policy
20 of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people and
21 instill health consciousness among them. In line with this policy, the
22 State shall endeavor to promote every Filipino’s full potential through
23 good vision by creating ways and means to prevent childhood cases of
24 avoidable blindness.

25 Towards this end, the State shall institute a program that will
26 help screen the school children for any possible visual problems.

27 **SEC. 3.** *Establishment of a National Vision Screening Program.* –
28 To be initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd), there is hereby
29 established a National Vision Screening Program (NVSP) which is
30 primarily intended to screen the eye vision of kindergarten pupils.

31 **SEC. 4.** *Program Objectives.* The objectives of the NVSP are:

32 (a) To identify early childhood visual problems;

33 (b) To provide immediate attention to visually impaired
34 kindergarten pupils and create a referral system so that they may be
35 checked and treated by eye specialists;

36 (c) To develop a vision screening results database for all
37 kindergarten pupils; and,

38 (d) To conduct continuing research on the state of visual
39 impairment among kindergarten pupils.

1 **SEC. 5. Program Implementation.** – The DepEd shall act as the
2 lead implementing agency for the NVSP, in coordination with the
3 Department of Health (DOH) and the Philippine Eye Research Institute
4 (PERI), National Institutes of Health, University of the Philippines –
5 Manila.

6 In the implementation of the NVSP, the DepEd shall:

7 (a) In coordination with the DOH and the PERI, administer the
8 vision screening program to all public kindergarten pupils, subject to
9 the written consent from the kindergarten pupils' parents or legal
10 guardians;

11 (b) Develop a system of referral and corrective measures for
12 kindergarten pupils who are suspected or diagnosed to have eye
13 ailments;

14 (c) Create a vision screening database, wherein results of the
15 screening per child can be found. Visual conditions diagnosed by the
16 eye specialists shall also be included in the information to be made
17 available in the DepEd database; and,

18 The private schools shall be encouraged to adopt their own
19 system of vision screening for kindergarten pupils enrolled in their
20 respective schools, subject to standards under the NVSP.

21 **SEC. 6. Quality Assurance.** – The DOH and the PERI shall be
22 vested with technical authority in conducting research and in providing
23 evidence-based recommendations to the DepEd on matters pertaining
24 to the NVSP. For purposes of quality assurance, the PERI shall be
25 authorized as the sole issuer of vision screening materials and shall
26 likewise be vested with the responsibility to train vision screening
27 trainers and screeners.

28 **SEC. 7. Monitoring and Continuing Research.** – In order to come
29 up with sound policy recommendations, the DepEd shall be tasked to
30 monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NVSP whereas the
31 PERI shall perform continuing research on childhood related eye vision
32 ailments.

33 **SEC. 8. The Vision Screening Continuing Research Fund.** –
34 There is hereby created a Vision Screening Continuing Research (VSCR)
35 Fund to be sourced from any donation or bequest made to the DepEd
36 in favor of the NVSP. The VSCR Fund shall be used to fund the PERI
37 for its continuing research program in connection with childhood
38 related eye vision ailments.

39 **SEC. 9. Tax Exemption.** – Any donation or bequest made to the
40 DepEd for the NVSP and for the VSCR Fund shall be exempt from
41 donor's tax and the same shall be considered allowable deduction from
42 the gross income of the donor, in accordance with the provisions of the
43 National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended: *Provided, That*
44 the donation is duly approved by the Secretary of Education.

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2 **SEC. 10. Appropriations.** – The Secretary of Education shall
3 immediately include in the Department's program the
4 operationalization of the NVSP intended for public kindergarten pupils,
5 the funding of which shall be included in the annual General
6 Appropriations Act.

7 For kindergarten pupils enrolled in private schools, the funding
8 needed for the implementation of their respective school's vision
9 screening program shall be assumed by the private schools concerned.

10 The funding needed for the implementation of the training
11 program for vision screening trainers and screeners, including the
12 continuing research in connection with childhood related eye vision
13 issues and concerns, shall be included in the budget of the PERI,
14 National Institutes of Health, University of the Philippines – Manila, in
15 the annual General Appropriations Act.

16 **SEC. 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – Within ninety
17 (90) days from the approval of this Act, the Secretary of Education, in
18 consultation with the heads of other participating government agencies,
19 shall formulate the rules and regulations implementing the provisions
20 of this Act. The implementing rules and regulations issued pursuant to
21 this section shall take effect thirty (30) days after its publication in a
22 national newspaper of general circulation.

23 **SEC. 12. Separability Clause.** – If any provision of this Act is
24 held invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not so declared
25 shall remain in force and effect.

26 **SEC. 13. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, decrees, orders and
27 rules and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of
28 this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

29 **SEC. 14. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days
30 after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general
31 circulation.

32 *Approved,*

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