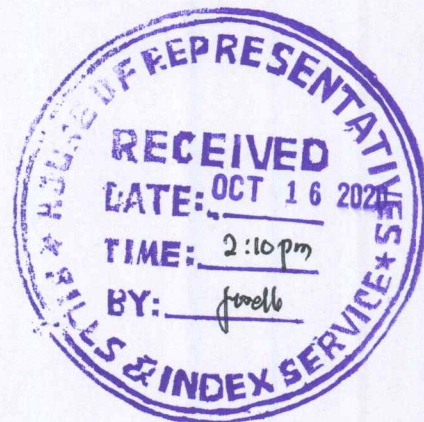


EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
Second Regular Session

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE BILL NO. 7891

Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE VIRGILIO S. LACSON**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The COVID-19 pandemic forces us to rethink the way we conduct our affairs. It brought new needs for the improvement and digitalization of government services. As we transition to the new normal, we envision a government that remains fully functional and mobilized even at uncertain times.

When lockdowns were imposed, certain services of the government were greatly affected. For instance, drivers' license renewal applications are postponed, law enforcement clearances are suspended, OFW deployments are deferred. For months, some government functions were stalled to the disadvantage of the public.

Even when the restrictions were eventually lifted, many government agencies are still scrambling to adapt and to execute their mandates while ensuring the safety of their personnel and their stakeholders. It is the responsibility of the State to expeditiously resume its governmental functions while implementing precautionary measures, such as disinfection and decontamination activities, social distancing policy, conduct of health status checks among employees, modification of work hours, among others. But our efforts must not stop there. We are challenged to evolve in our practices constantly.

This bill seeks to institutionalize alternative appearance, through teleconferencing or videoconferencing, as a valid form of appearance before government agencies – which, at present, only recognize personal appearance as the acceptable means. While there is no replacement for personal appearance as the best option, we need to be open to the use of teleconferencing/videoconferencing as a secondary method to empower agencies to function even in times of crisis. This bill likewise aims to provide a better experience for the people in terms of government services. Considering as well that many are still reluctant to go out, the allowance of alternative appearance will consequently improve public participation.

We must remain steadfast in our mission to give fast, reliable, and innovative service to the public, and in light of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

HON. VIRGILIO S. LACSON
Manila Teachers Partylist

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE BILL NO. 7891

Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE VIRGILIO S. LACSON**

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING TELECONFERENCING AND
VIDEOCONFERENCING AS ALTERNATIVE APPEARANCE OF
PERSONS BEFORE GOVERNMENT, ITS AGENCIES, AND
INSTRUMENTALITIES

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

Section 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the "*Alternative Appearance Act of 2020.*"

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to reaffirm the "No Contact Policy" of the government in its dealing with its constituents. To this end, it shall, continue to improve transparency, efficiency of its governance, and convenience for all stakeholders and Filipinos, by utilizing alternative avenues for dealings with the government such as teleconferencing, video conferencing, and other possible arrangements without necessity for contact; and to protect confidential information processed and utilized in connection therewith.

Section 3. Coverage. – This Act shall apply to all government offices and agencies including local government units (LGUs), government-owned or controlled corporations and other government instrumentalities, whether located in the Philippines or abroad, that provide services covering business and non-business-related transactions.

Section 4. Definitions. – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined –

- (1) "*Alternative appearance*" refers to an appearance before a covered government office by means of telecommunications and/or computer technologies;
- (2) "*Government*" refers to the government, its agencies and instrumentalities.

Section 5. Alternative Appearance Program. – Covered government offices shall offer alternative appearance to its constituents and persons whom it deals with; to allow persons to comply with personal appearances, submission of documents, and other such requirements of said government office, which would otherwise necessitate their physical appearance. For this purpose, the provision of the Republic Act no. 9485, otherwise known as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, shall have suppletory effect.

Section 6. Data Privacy and Protection. – The covered government office shall ensure protection of data used and processed of persons electing alternative appearance for official purposes. The government office shall educate employees handling sensitive personal information of all relevant laws concerning data privacy and protection. For this purpose, the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 shall have suppletory effect.

Section 7. Implementing Rules. – Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, all concerned government agencies and relevant stakeholders shall issue the appropriate implementing rules and regulations of this Act.

Section 8. Separability Clause. – If any provision or part of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 9. Repealing Clause. – All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations and other issuances or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

Section 10. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,