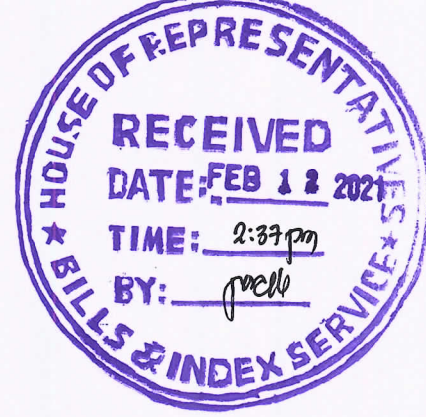


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 8680



Introduced by **HON. JOY MYRA S. TAMBUNTING**

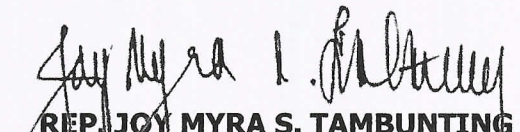
AN ACT
REQUIRING ALL PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS ENTITIES GRANTED WITH
CONGRESSIONAL FRANCHISES TO PROVIDE THEIR SUBSCRIBERS WITH FREE
ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The current COVID-19 pandemic exemplified the need for better dissemination of pertinent information and government issuances to the public. One of the problems encountered during the earlier months of the COVID-19 pandemic is the influx of rumors, conspiracy theories and reports of stigma around COVID-19 in social media channels—making it more difficult for people to identify what is factual and what is not. This created a misinformation problem during the earlier months as there is a huge number of Filipinos who only rely on free social media access provided by some internet providers, and thus have no means of verifying information from official government websites. With most internet packages being too costly for poor Filipinos, it is important that the government adopt measure to ensure that public information can be easily accessed without incurring extra charges.

This measure is proposed with the goal of making pertinent information from government entities more accessible to the public. This shall require public telecommunication entities to provide free access to all government websites. To aid public telecommunication entities in the provision of this service, the Department of Information and Communications and Communications Technology (DICT) is mandated to assist government agencies to ensure that their respective websites can be accessed with minimal data requirements.

On behalf of the people of Parañaque City's Second District, and for the common good of the Filipino people, the approval of the said measure is earnestly sought.


REP. JOY MYRA S. TAMBUNTING
2nd District, Parañaque City

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AN ACT
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ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

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 "Free Access to Government Websites Act".

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. – The State hereby recognizes the vital role of information and communication technology in nation-building, and declares it as a state policy to promote an environment that would ensure the availability and accessibility in the internet of official information from the government, and about government operations. Towards this end, the State shall mandate the public telecommunication entities granted with a Congressional privilege to operate as such to contribute in the promotion of availability and efficiency of access to government and lessen the digital divide in the country.

Sec. 3. Definition of Terms. –

- a) Government website – a website recognized by the DICT and being maintained for the government, whether national or local, including its agencies, departments, and corporations or enterprises that it owns or controls, with the main purpose of communicating official issuances, government transactions affecting public interest, vital information on the operations of the government, and other matters of legitimate public concern;
- b) Free access – shall mean the provision of full and uninhibited access to government websites by telecommunications entities without charging their subscribers of any fees;

- c) Public telecommunications entity – any person, firm, partnership or corporation, government or private, engaged in the provision of telecommunications services to the public for compensation;
- d) Subscriber – any person who uses, enjoys and pays for the services of public telecommunications entities;
- e) Telecommunications - any process which enables a telecommunications entity to relay and receive voice, data, electronic messages, written or printed matter, fixed or moving pictures, words, music or visible or audible signals or any control signals of any design and for any purpose by wire, radio or other electromagnetic, spectral, optical or technological means.

Sec. 4. *Free Access to Government Websites.* – All public telecommunication entities are required to provide free access to all government websites. To ease the burden of public telecommunication entities in their compliance with this Act, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) is mandated to assist government agencies in ensuring that their respective websites can be accessed with minimal data requirements.

Sec. 5. *Penalties.* – An public telecommunications entity who is found to have violated the provisions of this Act shall be punished with a fine of not less than One million pesos (P 1,000,000.00) but not more than Ten million pesos (P 10,000,000.00) and/or suspension or revocation of its legislative franchise and other permits and license by the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC).

Sec. 6. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The DICT, as lead implementing agency that will oversee the effective and efficient implementation of this Act, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations within one hundred twenty (120) days from the effectivity of this Act.

Sec. 7. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, orders, rules or regulations, other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

Sec. 8. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared invalid, other parts or provisions hereof not affected thereby shall remain and continue to be in full force and effect.

Sec. 9. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after the completion of its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,