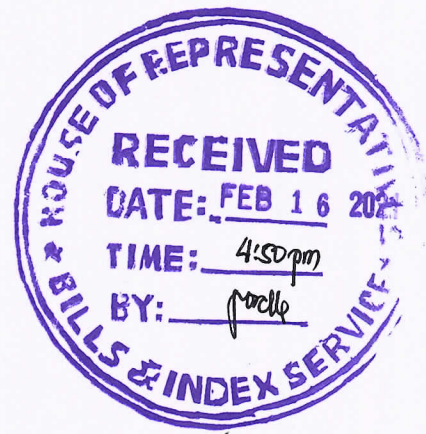


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. 8756



Introduced by the Honorable Precious Hipolito Castelo

EXPLANATORY NOTE

It cannot be denied that the election season is nearing. Since early last year, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) has continuously been laying out the groundwork for the 2022 elections albeit the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, preparations are in full steam, as COMELEC opens their offices from Tuesdays to Saturdays in order to reach their target of 4 million new voters.

Last February 10, 2021, COMELEC has promulgated Resolution No. 10695 which provides for the calendar of activities and periods of certain prohibited acts in connection with the upcoming May 09, 2022 national and local elections. Certainly, as days go by, more work has to be done. It must be presumed that COVID-19 will still be here on the day of elections. Thus, it is important to establish systems in place to prevent the happening of super-spreader events in polling places.

It is thus the intent of this bill to provide for an opportunity for qualified senior citizens and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to vote ahead of the election day. Considering that they belong to the most vulnerable sectors, it is a must that they be given a chance to cast their ballots without compromising their physical health and safety. Undoubtedly, this should not be taken lightly as thousands might just choose not to vote and be effectively disenfranchised because of fears of contracting the virus.

The truest sense of democracy lies on the people's right to suffrage. As such, the State must do everything to protect it and to make sure that everyone will have the opportunity to exercise such right.

Thus, the immediate passage of this bill is most earnestly sought.


PRECIOUS HIPOLITO CASTELO

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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR EARLY VOTING FOR QUALIFIED SENIOR CITIZENS AND
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be referred to as the “Early Voting Act for Senior Citizens and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – The State shall ensure that persons with disabilities and senior citizens are able to exercise their right to political participation without difficulties and restrictions. Towards this end, senior citizens and PWDs shall be provided with appropriate accommodations for early voting in order to safeguard and uphold the secrecy and sanctity of their ballot. Furthermore, facilities for safe and orderly voting for these vulnerable sectors shall be set up in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SEC. 3. *Early Voting System.* – The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) shall establish a system for early voting of senior citizens and PWDs at accessible polling precincts pre-designated to be venues for early voting. Early voting shall happen within seven (7) working days before the date set for the election.

SEC. 4. *Who are qualified for early voting.* – Senior citizens and PWDs who are registered to vote shall automatically qualify to exercise their early voting privileges. The Commission may, however, set up an online system for voluntary pre-registration for the sole purpose of determining the estimated number of voters who would want to avail of the option to vote early.

SEC. 5. *Nationwide information campaign.* – The Commission must launch a nationwide information campaign in order to maximize the reach of early voting for qualified senior citizens and PWDs.

SEC. 6. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Commission, in coordination with other relevant government agencies, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 7. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the effective implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations for the Commission under the current General Appropriations Act. Thereafter, such amount as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 8. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 9. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with, the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

SEC. 10. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,