

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 7207



Introduced by **HONORABLE RAMON JOLO B. REVILLA,**
HONORABLE LANI MERCADO-REVILLA, and HONORABLE BRYAN B. REVILLA

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to aptly allow early voting for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs) for at least a week before the day of national and local elections. It shall alleviate the physical inconvenience experienced by our senior citizens and PWDs during elections by allowing them to cast their votes faster and conveniently.

Suffrage is a fundamental right for it affirms the sanctity and integrity of the democratic process. No less than the 1987 Constitution affirms the right to suffrage for all Filipinos, including those in the vulnerable sectors such as senior citizens and PWDs. In recognition of the contributions made by our senior citizens and PWDs in nation-building, their safety, needs, and convenience must not be undermined to allow them to exercise their inherent right to political participation.

According to the Philippines Statistics Authority, there are 15,078,121 Filipinos aged 60 years old and above as of May 2020.¹ Respectively, the Vulnerable Sector Office (VSO) of the Commission on Elections tallied around 512,000 registered persons with disabilities in 2022.² However, many of them experience physical difficulties during elections, such as lining in congested queues for many hours which expose them to certain health risks like heatstroke and severe fatigue.

While Republic Act No. 10366 mandates the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to establish Accessible Polling Places (APP) for PWDs and senior citizens, a 2022 data has shown that

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority. National QuickStat – January 2023. Data retrieved from <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/quickstat/national-quickstat/all/>

² Philippine Star. Accessible voting precincts for PWDs a good start, but more inclusive coverage still needed. Information retrieved from <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/05/06/2179194/accessible-voting-precincts-pwds-good-start-more-inclusive-coverage-still-needed>. Dated May 6, 2022

only 3.86% or 421,221 voters of the registered 10.5 million PWDs and senior citizens signed up to use the said establishments.³ Moreover, around 42 provinces were revealed that no voter showed their intent to vote in an APP.⁴

During the 2022 elections, the low take up of the APPs prompted the COMELEC to provide for Emergency Accessible Polling Places (EAPP) for senior citizens and PWDs who were not able to sign up for the APP priorly or did not update their registration. As such, many of our senior citizens and PWDs were left confused and exhausted on not knowing it was mandatory for them to update their registration, therefore preventing them from enjoying the privilege granted by the abovementioned law.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate approval of this bill is earnestly sought.


RAMON JOLO B. REVILLA III


LANI MERCADO-REVILLA


BRYAN B. REVILLA

³ Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. "Early voting for PWDs? May 2022 polls posed multiple barriers to voters with disabilities". Information retrieved from <https://pcij.org/article/9761/may-2022-polls-posed-multiple-barriers-to-voters-with-disabilities>. Dated February 9, 2023

⁴ Ibid.

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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR EARLY VOTING BY QUALIFIED SENIOR CITIZENS AND PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTION

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

SECTION 1. Declaration of Policy. – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to make voting convenient for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs) by giving them the option to vote earlier than the date set for the elections.

SEC. 2. Early Voting. – For national and local elections, there shall be early voting where qualified senior citizens and PWDs may choose to cast their ballot at accessible establishments designated by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) within seven (7) working days before the date set for the elections.

SEC. 3. Registration. – There shall be a nationwide registration for senior citizens and PWDs to qualify them to avail of this early voting privilege. Those who are not registered under this Act shall vote on Election Day.

SEC. 4. Obligations of the COMELEC. – To ensure the effective implementation of this Act, the COMELEC shall:

- (a) Keep a record of senior citizens and PWDs who are registered voters;

- (b) Design a registration system, in coordination with local government units, the National Council on Disability Affairs, the Commission on Human Rights, the Department of Health and the Department of Interior and Local Government, that allows senior citizens and PWDs to register and opt for early voting;
- (c) Ensure that polling places are safe and accessible to senior citizens and PWDs, and properly fitted with the necessary communication, visual and physical aids, as mandated under Republic Act No. 10366 entitled, An Act Authorizing the Commission on Elections to Establish Precincts Assigned to Accessible Polling Places Exclusively for Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens”; and
- (d) Mount an intensive information campaign on early voting for qualified senior citizens and PWDs.

SEC 5. Appropriations. – The initial amount for the implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year’s appropriations of the COMELEC. Thereafter, the funding of which shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 6. Applicability of Other Laws. – The provisions of Batas Pambansa Bilang 881 or the Omnibus Election Code; Republic Act No. 7166, entitled, “An Act Providing for Synchronized National and Local Elections and for Electoral Reforms, Authorizing Appropriations Therefor, and for Other Purposes”; and other election laws not inconsistent herewith shall be applied to facilitate early voting for qualified senior citizens and PWDs.

SEC. 7. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within ninety (90) days from its effectivity, the Commission shall promulgate the rules and regulations for the implementation of this Act.

SEC. 8. Separability Clause. – If any portion or provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected thereby shall remain in force and effect.

SEC 9. Repealing Clause. – All other laws, acts, presidential decrees, executive orders, issuances, presidential proclamations, rules and regulations or parts thereof, which are contrary to and inconsistent with any provision of this Act, are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SEC. 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,