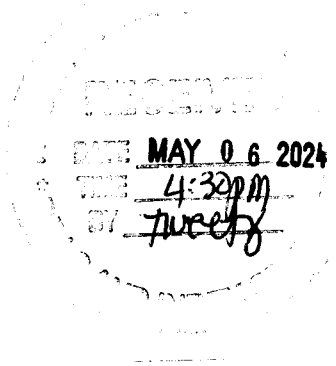
Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila



NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10352

Introduced by **Representative Jaime R. Fresnedi**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This proposed legislation seeks to establish a Vision Care Program for Indigent Children and to award grants for the said program to complement the efforts of local government units (LGUs) in providing free and accessible health care. This program, which gives priority to kids aged 8 and under, aims to provide free comprehensive eye examinations for indigent children.

A study published by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)[1] on the Cost of Raising Children with Disabilities in the Philippines estimates that there are about 1.6 million Filipino children with disabilities. Among these, the Department of Education (DepEd) identified 232,975 learners with disabilities or learning exceptionalities[2] who were mainstreamed in regular classes. DepEd classifies exceptionalities into: 1) exceptionalities with diagnosis from a specialist which lists 11 conditions that includes visual impairment and intellectual disability; and 2) exceptionalities based on manifestation which includes difficulty in seeing as one of its conditions. Visual impairment had the greatest number of cases among learners from Grades 7 to 12 with a total of 13,828 cases while intellectual disability was prevalent among children from kindergarten to Grade 6 with a total of 20,377 cases.[3] On the same dataset, a total of 41,317 children reported having difficulties in seeing with most prevalent cases in Grades 7 to 12.

A 2018 study conducted by the UP Manila National Institutes of Health's Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI) mentions that vision impairment and blindness rank among the major concerns in the country. Of some 1.98 million Filipinos affected, some 400,000 have uncorrected error refraction or myopia[4] and Amblyopia has a prevalence rate of 2-5% among children, making it one of the causes of visual impairment and preventable blindness. According to Dr. Leo Cubillian, director of said institute, 10% of kindergarten-aged Filipino pupils are suffering from visual impairment citing that four pupils in every class of 40 have

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[1] https://www.unicef.org/philippines/media/5941/file/Full%20report%20-%20cost%20of%20raising%20children%20with%20disabilities%20in%20the%20Philippines.pdf (September, 2022)

[2] 2 DepEd uses the term exceptionality to refer to disability. DepEd Datasets www.deped.gov.ph

[3] Special Education (SPED) Profile in the Philippines (https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/Facts%20in%20Figures/FF2023-17_Special_Education_Profile_in_the_Phil.pdf)

[4] https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/08/06/1726085/over-2-million-pinoys-blind-sight-impaired

vision problems and three of them are due to error of refraction or myopia (nearsightedness) while one may have amblyopia or lazy eye[5].

While the prevalence of visual impairments in children may be related to genetics, many parents are using gadgets as placeholders to keep their kids occupied, resulting in more screen time, exposing kids to blue light coming from electronic devices. While this may be the case, the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology stressed that poor vision could impair the performance of children in school and their interactions with the community which are necessary for their overall holistic development.

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

JAIME R. FRESNEDI
Representative
Lone District, Muntinlupa City

[5] https://www.upm.edu.ph/cpt_news/highlight-on-visual-impairment-among-filipino-children/

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NINETEENTH CONGRESS
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HOUSE BILL NO. 10352

Introduced by **Rep. Jaime R. Fresnedi**

AN ACT
TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL VISION CARE PROGRAM FOR INDIGENT CHILDREN UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the "*Vision Care Program for Indigent Children Act*"

SEC. 2. *Definition of Terms.* – For the purposes of this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

(a) "Indigent children" refers to unemancipated children below eighteen (18) years of age who have vision problems requiring medical services for their care and treatment, taking into account the following factors:

(1) the age of the child;
(2) the financial condition of the family;
(3) the degree of deprivation of parental care and support; and
(4) the inability of their parents to exercise parental authority.

(b) "Comprehensive Eye Examination" includes an assessment of a patient's history, general medical observation, external and ophthalmoscopic examination, visual acuity, ocular alignment and motility, refraction, and as appropriate, binocular vision or gross visual fields, performed by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist.

SEC. 3. *Vision Care Program for Indigent Children.* – All local government units (LGUs) are hereby mandated to establish a Vision Care Program for Indigent Children which shall:

(a) Provide free comprehensive eye examinations by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist for indigent children who have been previously identified through a vision screening or eye examination by a licensed health care provider or vision screener as needing such services, with priority given to indigent children who are under eight years old;

(b) Provide free treatment or services, subsequent to the examinations described in the aforementioned paragraph, necessary to correct vision problems; and

(c) Develop and disseminate to parents, teachers, and health care practitioners' educational materials on recognizing signs of visual impairment in children: *Provided,* That the LGU shall not expend more than 20 percent of the amount received under the grant to carry out the purpose described in this paragraph.

SEC. 4. All Department of Health (DOH) accredited hospitals, medical centers, clinics, infirmaries or puericulture centers duly licensed to operate as such, are hereby required to render medical and ophthalmology services to indigent children.

SEC. 5. *Grant Regarding Vision Care Program for Indigent Children.* – The Secretary of the DOH shall establish an extension service to capacitate qualified LGUs in establishing such a program and set aside funds that can be tapped by LGUs who do not have the financial capability to implement the program.

SEC. 6. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), in coordination with the DOH, shall formulate the rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this Act within six (6) months from its effectivity.

SEC. 7. *Appropriations.* – Such sums as may be necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be taken from the current appropriations of the DOH and respective budgets of LGUs. Thereafter, the fund necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

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

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

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

Approved,