

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

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Third Regular Session

House Bill No. **10689**



Introduced by Honorable Ma. Alana Samanta Taliño Santos

**AN ACT CREATING THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS
AND THE OFFICE OF AUTISM SERVICES**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong and pervasive developmental condition that impairs a person's social interaction and communication. It involves repetitive and limited patterns of behavior that poses difficulty assimilating in society. ASD occurs in all racial and socioeconomic groups, affecting 1 out of 36 children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

There are still no updated prevalence studies for ASD in the Philippines, yet they pose a significant economic burden to Filipino families. Care costs disproportionately impact low-income families. Autism needs for minimum wage households take up 21 percent of their monthly income, and are estimated to rise to 55 percent for below minimum wage earners. There is also no national data tracking system that caters to the state of autism in the country.

While the National Autism Consciousness Week as issued by Proclamation No. 711 s. 1996 recognizes the importance of this condition, existing government policies and programs are not sufficient. Research clearly shows that institutional support positively impacts the quality of life of ASD diagnosed people. Yet there are also no comprehensive training programs for health providers in dealing with this.

This measure seeks to create a comprehensive assessment on the state of ASD in the country, increasing the understanding of this diagnosis. The goal is to identify low-cost interventions that are part of a comprehensive system of care delivery. The measure proposes a needs assessment for individuals in the autism spectrum, which serves as the baseline information for the government's operational plan for autism.

The creation of a commission will better equip parents, teachers, health providers, and the wider Filipino community in addressing the needs of persons with autism and ultimately develop the appropriate response for this lifelong diagnosis. These considerations reflect the urgent need to pass this measure. As such, the immediate approval of this bill is earnestly requested.

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MA. ALANA SAMANTHA TALIÑO SANTOS

Representative
3rd District, Cotabato Province

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

SECTION 1. Short Title. - This shall be known as the "Philippine Commission on
Autism Spectrum Disorders Act."

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby declared policy of the State to protect
and promote the right to health, physical, moral, and social well-being of the people.
Towards this end, the State shall exert efforts to develop a comprehensive nationwide plan
for an integrated system of training, treatment, and services for individuals of all ages with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. - As used in this Act, the following terms shall mean:

1. *Autism Spectrum Disorder* - Defined as the standard diagnostic criteria for pervasive
developmental disorder, to include autistic disorder; Asperger's syndrome;
pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified; childhood disintegrative
disorder and Rett's syndrome.
2. *Department of Health* - Herein, referred to as the Department.

SEC. 4. Philippine Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders. - There is hereby
created a "Philippine Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders" under the Department of
Health. It shall advise and make recommendations to the president, legislature, and
relevant government agencies regarding matters concerning all levels of Autism Spectrum
Disorder
services including health care, education, and other adult and adolescent services.

The Commission shall meet on at least four (4) occasions annually, including at least
two (2) occasions before the end of December in the first year the Commission is fully
established. It may hold meetings by telephone or video conference.

The Department shall provide technical and administrative support as required by the Commission.

SEC. 5. *Composition of Members.* - The Commission shall be composed of nineteen (19) members, consisting of the following:

- (1) Four (4) members of the legislature, with two (2) members from the Senate and two (2) members from the House of Representatives. The Senate President shall appoint one (1) member from the majority and one (1) member from the minority. Also, the Speaker of the House shall appoint one (1) member from the majority and one (1) member from the minority;
- (2) The Director of the National Center for Mental Health, or his or her designee;
- (3) The Secretary of Health, or his or her designee;
- (4) The Secretary of Education, or his or her designee;
- (5) The Secretary of Social Welfare and Development, or his or her designee;
- (6) The Commissioner of Higher Education, or his or her designee;
- (7) An individual employed as a director/principal of special education at a school district located in the country;
- (8) A speech and language pathologist;
- (9) A diagnostician;
- (10) A mental health provider;
- (11) A primary care physician;
- (12) Two (2) parents of individuals with autism spectrum disorder, including one (1) parent of an individual under the age of eighteen and one (1) parent of an individual over the age of eighteen;
- (13) Two (2) individuals with autism spectrum disorder; and
- (14) A representative from an independent private provider or non-profit provider or organization.

The members of the Commission, other than the members from the legislature and ex-officio members, shall be appointed by the President. The Chair of the Commission shall be selected by the members of the commission. Of the members first appointed to the

Commission by the president, half shall serve a term of four years and half shall serve a term of two years, and thereafter, members shall serve a term of four years. Members shall continue to serve until their successor is duly appointed and qualified. Any vacancy in the Commission shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment. However, all vacancies, prior to the expiration of the term of office, shall be filled for the unexpired term only.

Members shall serve the commission without compensation but may be reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses from money appropriated to the Department of Health.

The members of the commission shall consist of a broad representation of Filipino citizens, both urban and rural, who are concerned with the health and quality of life for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Further, there should be at least two (2) women members in the Commission.

SEC. 6. Duties and Responsibilities. - The Commission shall make recommendations for developing a comprehensive nationwide plan for an integrated system of training, treatment, and services for individuals of all ages with Autism Spectrum Disorder. A year after the approval of this Act, the commission shall issue preliminary findings and recommendations to the legislature.

In preparing the national plan, the commission shall specifically perform the following responsibilities and report on them accordingly:

(1) Study and report on the means for developing a comprehensive, coordinated system of care delivery across the country to address the increased and increasing presence of Autism Spectrum Disorder and ensure that resources are created, well-utilized, and appropriately spread across the country:

(a) Determine the need for the creation of centers for diagnostic excellence in designated sectors of the country, which could provide clinical services including assessment, diagnoses, and treatment of patients;

(b) Plan for effectively evaluating regional service areas throughout the country and their capacity including outlining personnel and skills that exist within the service area, other capabilities that exist, and resource needs that may be unmet;

(c) Assess the need for additional behavioral intervention capabilities and as necessary, the means for expanding those capabilities in a regional service area; and

(d) Develop recommendations for expanding these services in conjunction with hospitals after considering the resources that exist in terms of specialty clinics and hospitals, and hospital inpatient care capabilities;

(2) Conduct an assessment of the need for coordinated, enhanced and targeted special education capabilities within each region of the country;

(3) Develop a recommendation for enlisting appropriate universities and colleges to ensure support and collaboration in developing certification or degree programs for students specializing in Autism Spectrum Disorder intervention. This may include degree programs in education, special education, social work, and psychology; and

(4) Other responsibilities may include but not be limited to:

(a) Provide recommendations regarding training programs and the content of training programs being developed;

(b) Recommend individuals to participate in a committee of major stakeholders charged with developing screening, diagnostic, assessment, and treatment standards;

(c) Participate in recommending a panel of qualified professionals and experts to review existing models of evidence-based educational practices for adaptation specific to Filipinos;

(d) Examine the barriers to accurate information of the prevalence of individuals with autism spectrum disorder across the country and recommend a process for accurate reporting of demographic data;

(e) Explore the need for the creation of interagency councils and evaluation of current councils to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated system of care for all individuals with autism spectrum disorder; and

(f) Study or explore other developmental delay disorders and genetic conditions known to be associated with autism, including fragile X syndrome, Sotos syndrome, Angelman syndrome, and tuberous sclerosis.

SEC. 7. Appropriation. - The amount necessary for the effective implementation of this Act shall be funded out of the appropriations of the Department of Health. Thereafter, such amounts as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 8. Separability Clause. - Any provision or provisions of this Act that may be declared unconstitutional or invalid shall not have the effect of nullifying other portions or provision hereof as long as such remaining portions can still subsist and be given effect in their entirety.

SEC. 9. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, ordinances, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof which are inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 10. *Effectivity Clause.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days from the date of its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,