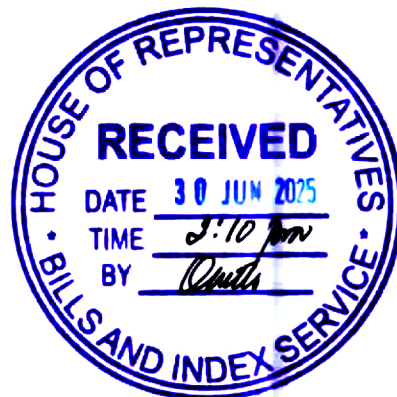




Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 497



Introduced by Representative Crispin Diego “Ping” D. Remulla

**AN ACT
TO ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE VISION CARE TO
CHILDREN**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

According to the 2018 Philippine National Blindness Survey and Eye Disease Study conducted by the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI) under the National Institutes of Health – University of the Philippines Manila, approximately 1 in every 10 school-aged children in the country suffers from some form of visual impairment. Specifically, data show that in a typical classroom of 40 pupils, four students have vision problems, three of which are due to refractive errors, such as myopia (nearsightedness), while one may suffer from amblyopia, also known as “lazy eye.”

Amblyopia, with a prevalence rate of 2–5% among children, is a leading cause of preventable visual impairment and childhood blindness in the Philippines. If not detected and treated early, ideally before the age of 7, amblyopia can lead to permanent vision loss, negatively impacting a child’s educational performance and social development.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that 80% of what children learn is acquired through visual processing. In line with this, the Department of Health (DOH) has identified visual impairment as one of the top ten causes of disability in the country. Uncorrected visual issues in children are strongly linked with developmental delays, academic

underperformance, and the increased need for special education and social services. Furthermore, studies show that at least 20% of children with learning disabilities have associated visual information processing problems.

Despite these alarming statistics, access to pediatric eye care remains limited, particularly in underserved and rural areas. Routine vision screening programs are inconsistent across schools, and comprehensive eye exams, which include refraction, eye alignment, and internal eye health checks, are not universally mandated for early childhood development programs or public school systems.

This bill seeks to address this gap by institutionalizing mandatory comprehensive eye examinations for children identified to be at high risk for visual impairment, especially those entering early grades in public schools.

Ensuring the early detection and correction of vision problems in children is not merely a public health issue; it is an educational and social justice imperative. By investing in children's eye health, we are also investing in their future, enabling them to learn more effectively, participate more fully, and thrive as productive members of society.

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


CRISPIN DIEGO "PING" D. REMULLA



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

1 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** - This Act shall be known as the “*Vision Care for Kids Act*”.

2 **SEC. 2. *Definition of Terms.*** – The following terms as used in this Act shall be defined
3 as follows:

4 (1) “*Comprehensive Eye Examination*” includes an assessment of a patient’s
5 history, general medical observation, external and ophthalmoscopic
6 examination, visual acuity, ocular alignment and motility, refraction, and as
7 appropriate, binocular vision or gross visual fields, performed by an optometrist
8 or an ophthalmologist;

9 (2) “*Secretary*” refers to the Secretary of Health.

10 **SEC. 3. *Grant regarding vision care for children.*** –

11 (a) In general – The Secretary, may award grants to local government units (LGUs)
12 on the basis of an established review process for the purpose of complementing
13 existing government efforts for:

14 (1) providing comprehensive eye examinations by a licensed optometrist or
15 ophthalmologist for children who have been previously identified
16 through a vision screening or eye examination by a licensed health care

1 provider or vision screener as needing such services, with priority given
2 to children who are under nine (9) years old;

3 (2) providing treatment or services, subsequent to the examinations
4 described in paragraph (1), necessary to correct vision problems; and,

5 (3) developing and disseminating, to parents, teachers, and health care
6 practitioners, educational materials on recognizing signs of visual
7 impairment in children.

8 (b) Criteria and coordination – The Secretary, in consultation with appropriate
9 professional and consumer organizations including individuals with knowledge
10 of age appropriate vision services, shall develop criteria governing the operation
11 of the grant program under subsection (a), and for the collection of data related
12 to vision assessment and the utilization of follow up services

13 (c) Application – to be eligible to receive a grant under subsection (a), an LGU shall
14 submit to the Secretary an application in such form, made in such manner, and
15 containing such information as the Secretary may require, including the
16 following:

17 (1) information on existing government-funded children vision programs;

18 (2) a plan for the use of grant funds, including how funds will be used to
19 complement existing State efforts (including possible partnerships with
20 non-profit entities);

21 (3) a plan to determine if a grant eligible child has been identified as
22 provided for in Section 3(a); and,

23 (4) a description of how funds will be used to provide items or services only
24 as a secondary payer to any local government compensation program,
25 under an insurance policy, or under any government health benefits
26 program, or by any entity that provides health services on a prepaid
27 basis.

28 (d) Evaluations – To be eligible to receive a grant under subsection (a), an LGU
29 shall agree that, no later than one (1) year after the date on which amounts under
30 the grant are first received by it, and annually thereafter while receiving amounts
31 under the grant, the LGU will submit to the Secretary an evaluation of the
32 operations and activities carried out under the grant, including –

1 (1) an assessment of the utilization of vision services and the status of
2 children receiving these services as a result of the activities carried out
3 under the grant;

4 (2) the collection, analysis, and reporting of children's vision data according
5 to guidelines prescribed by the Secretary; and,

6 (3) such other information as the Secretary may require.

7 (e) Limitations in Expenditure of Grant – A grant may be made under subsection

8 (a) only if the LGU involved agrees that it will not expend more than twenty
9 percent (20%) of the amount received under the grant to carry out the purpose
10 described in paragraph (3) of such subsection.

11 **SEC. 4. *Mandatory School-Based Vision Screening.*** – All schools shall conduct
12 mandatory annual vision screenings for children from kindergarten to Grade 3.

13 **SEC. 5. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – The DOH, in coordination with
14 DepEd, and DILG shall develop the implementing rules and regulations for this Act.

15 **SEC. 6. *Appropriations.*** – Such sums as may be necessary for the initial
16 implementation of this Act shall be taken from the current appropriations of the Department of
17 Health (DOH). Thereafter, the fund necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be
18 included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

19 **SEC. 7. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or
20 unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision or part not otherwise affected shall
21 remain valid and subsisting.

22 **SEC. 8. *Repealing Clause.*** – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order,
23 letter of instruction, administrative order, rule, or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with
24 the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

25 **SEC. 9. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication
26 in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,