



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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 534



Introduced by **Representative EDUARDO R. RAMA, JR.**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In the latest report by the United Nations on Food Security and Nutrition, the Philippines finds itself grappling with an alarming rise in hunger incidence, positioning it as one of the most food-insecure nations in the Southeast Asia region.¹ Food security is defined as the “situation where all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle”. Absence of which results in food insecurity.²

As the Philippines contends with a looming food crisis and inflation, hunger and malnutrition continue to plague countless Filipino families. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (“PIDS”), many Filipino households are unable to consume nutritious food as this is becoming less affordable and inaccessible.³ Consequently, the mental and physical development of children hampers them from acquiring and enhancing necessary cognitive and non-cognitive skills which creates a functioning and skilled labor force.⁴

In line with the government’s efforts to address these pressing issues head-on, this legislation aims to strengthen and institutionalize the Walang Gutom 2027: Food Stamp Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (“DSWD”). The aforementioned program is one of DSWD’s major programs initiated under the leadership of Secretary Rexlon “Rex” T.

¹ Jocson, LMJC (14 July 2023) Nearly 51M Filipinos face food insecurity—UN Report. *Business World*
[Online: https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2023/07/14/534036/nearly-51m-filipinos-face-food-insecurity-un-report/](https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2023/07/14/534036/nearly-51m-filipinos-face-food-insecurity-un-report/).

² Suansing, B. (02 November 2017). What causes Food insecurity in the Philippines. *Borgen Magazine*. <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/causes-food-insecurity-in-the-philippines/>.

³ Inquirer (23 July 2022). No Filipinos Should Go Hungry. *Philippine Institute for Development Studies*. <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/no-filipino-should-go-hungry>.

⁴ Inquirer (11 April 2023). The Real Cost of Malnutrition. *Philippine Institute for Development Studies*. <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/the-real-cost-of-malnutrition>.

Gatchalian to address the social and developmental needs of Filipinos. At its core, the program seeks to extend a lifeline to eligible Filipino households through a monthly augmentation provision of at least Three Thousand Pesos (PhP3,000.00) via the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card. Beyond mere sustenance, this initiative also serves as a gateway to employment opportunities for its beneficiaries, *fostering economic resilience and empowerment within our communities.*

Eradicating hunger, achieving food security, and improving nutrition must be a paramount consideration of our nation's agenda. In our pursuit of improving the socioeconomic fabric of society, no Filipino should be left hungry.

Given the urgency of this Bill, its enactment is highly suggested.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eduardo Roa Rama, Jr.', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

REP. EDUARDO ROA RAMA, JR.
2nd District, City of Cebu



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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 534

Introduced by **Representative EDUARDO R. RAMA, JR.**

**AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING AND STRENGTHENING THE FOOD STAMP
PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT,
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREOF**

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

1 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** — This Act shall be known as the “Food Stamp Program Act of
2 2025”.

3 **SECTION 2. *Declaration of State Policy*** — The State commits to adopting an integrated
4 and comprehensive approach to ensure the availability of essential goods and social services to all
5 citizens at an affordable cost, thereby fostering national prosperity and enhancing the quality of life.

6 **SECTION 3. *Objective.*** — The bill seeks to institutionalize the food stamp program of the
7 Department of Social Welfare and Development (“DWSD”), with the primary goal of mitigating
8 hunger and malnutrition among the most vulnerable sectors in society, particularly impoverished
9 Filipino households, through the monthly provision of meal augmentation valued at Three Thousand
10 Pesos (PhP3,000.00).

11 **SECTION 4. *Definition of Terms.*** — For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall
12 be understood as follows:

1 **Account Number** — the unique number on the electronic benefit transfer card of the
2 beneficiary.

3 **Beneficiary** — refers to households who are eligible to receive cash assistance through the
4 electronic benefit transfer card under this Act.

5 **Beneficiary- holder** — refers to the person named in the electronic benefit transfer card who
6 belongs to a household beneficiary.

7 **Competent Evidence of Identity** — refers to the identification of an individual based on (a)
8 at least one (1) current identification issued by a government agency bearing the photograph and the
9 signature of the individual; or (b) the oath or affirmation of one credible witness not privy to the
10 instrument, document or transaction who is personally known to the notary public and who personally
11 knows the individual, or of two credible witnesses neither of whom is privy to the instrument,
12 document or transaction who each personally knows the individual and shows to the notary public
13 documentary identification.

14 **Electronic Reader** — refers to a hardware device that can read plastic cards and decode the
15 information embedded in the card with a magnetic strip or microchip.

16 **Food Items** — shall refer to food or food products intended for home preparation and human
17 consumption, including crops, seeds, and plants. This shall also include common foods identified by
18 the Food and Nutrition Research Institute as the daily nutritional guide for every
19 Filipino.

20 **Gross Monthly Income** — the monthly household income before deductions are applied.

21 **Household** — shall refer to those persons who are living together and prepare and purchase
22 meals together.

23 **Marginalized or disadvantaged sectors** — include sectors of farmer-peasant, artisanal
24 fisherfolk, workers in the formal sector and migrant workers; workers in the informal sector;
25 indigenous peoples and cultural communities; women; differently-abled persons; senior citizens;
26 victims of calamities and disasters; youth and students; children; urban poor; cooperatives; and non-
27 government organization.

28 **Personal Information** — any information whether recorded in a material form or not, from
29 which the identity of an individual is apparent or can be reasonably and directly ascertained by the

entity holding the information, or when put together with other information would directly and certainly identify an individual.

Personal Identification Number (PIN) — a secret number created by the beneficiary for his or her electronic benefit transfer card to pay for the food items purchased under this Act.

Point of Sale (POS) Terminal — a complete payment system that facilitates the authentication of payments using cards.

Poor Household — refers to households living below the poverty threshold.

Poverty Threshold refers to the minimum income required for a family or individual to meet the basic food and non-food requirements, as determined by the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Sensitive Personal Information — covers personal information: (1) about an individual's race, ethnic origin, marital status, age, color, and religious, philosophical, or political affiliations; (2) about an individual's health, education, genetic, or sexual life of a person, or to any proceeding for any offense committed or alleged to have been committed by such person, the disposal of such proceedings, or the sentence of any court in such proceedings; (3) issued by government agencies peculiar to an individual which includes, but not limited to, social security numbers, previous or current health records, licenses or their denials, suspension or revocation, and tax returns; and (4) specifically established by executive order or an act of Congress to be kept classified.

For purposes of this Act, this shall also include the personal identification number and account assigned to the beneficiary in his or her electronic benefits transfer card.

SECTION 5. *Identification of Eligible beneficiaries.* — To be eligible under the program, the household must be earning a gross monthly income falling below the official poverty threshold as determined by the Philippine Statistics Authority ("PSA").

Households that have at least one (1) member belonging to marginalized or disadvantaged groups, as listed in Republic Act No. 8425 and the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act, whose income falls below the poverty threshold or cannot afford to provide their basic needs, or identified as "poor" by the National Targeting Household System for Poverty Reduction ("NHTS-PR"), also known as the *Listahan 3.0*, are automatically qualified beneficiaries under the program.

1 **SECTION 6. *Application for Food Stamp Program.*** — Individuals meeting the beneficiary
2 criteria may apply for the program by submitting competent evidence of identity and relevant
3 documents to their local DSWD offices.

4 Upon approval, beneficiaries shall undergo orientation regarding their rights and obligations
5 under this Act, as well as the utilization of Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards.

6 **SECTION 7. *Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards.*** — Eligible beneficiaries shall be issued
7 Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards (“EBT”) cards by the DSWD, each equipped with a corresponding
8 Personal Identification Number (“PIN”) and valid for one (1) year from issuance. Monthly,
9 beneficiaries will receive Three Thousand Pesos (PhP3,000.00) or more, during government-declared
10 national emergencies, accessible through their EBT cards.

11 These cards are intended for purchasing food items recommended by the Food and
12 Nutrition Research Institute (“FNRI”) from accredited local retailers, with certain exclusions such as
13 alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, vitamins, medicine, supplements, and non-food items.

14 The processing of beneficiary personal information and sensitive data shall adhere to the
15 standards set forth in Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act.

16 **SECTION 8. *Partner Merchants and Local Retailers.*** The DSWD, in partnership with
17 the Department of Agriculture (“DA”) and the Department of Trade and Industry (“DTI”), shall
18 facilitate the identification, registration, and accreditation of partner merchants and local retailers.
19 Local vendors, micro-small, and medium-sized enterprises, and local retailers selling food items may
20 apply as partner merchants and accreditation. Only those purchases made from accredited merchants
21 and retailers shall be credited to the EBT account of the beneficiary.

22 Upon accreditation, the merchants and retailers shall be provided with an electronic reader or
23 a point of sale terminal (“POS”) by the DSWD, where the beneficiary-holder can run through the
24 EBT card when paying for the food items. Every receipt issued after purchase shall show the amount
25 remaining in the EBT account.

26 The DSWD shall coordinate with the DA to register and accredit Kadiwa Centers, and local
27 farmers as partner merchants and local retailers.

28 **SECTION 9. *Obligation of Beneficiary-holders.*** — Beneficiary-holders are mandated to
29 utilize EBT cards exclusively for purchasing food items from accredited merchants and retailers.

1 Unauthorized lending of EBT cards is prohibited, except in exceptional circumstances with prior
2 household authorization. In cases of card loss or damage, notification to the DSWD within a
3 reasonable period and an affidavit of loss is required for the issuance of a replacement EBT card.

4 Beneficiary-holders and their households are further obliged to attend capacity-building
5 sessions and community assemblies organized by the DSWD and Department of Health (“DOH”)
6 and participate in job-generating programs facilitated by the Department of Labor and Employment
7 (“DOLE”) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (“TESDA”) to ensure
8 sustained benefits.

9 **SECTION 10. *Obligation of Partner Merchants and Local Retailers.*** — Partner merchants
10 and local retailers must verify the identity of EBT holders before conducting transactions, and display
11 conspicuous signage indicating their accreditation status and acceptance of EBT cards. These
12 establishments are also required to maintain separate inventories for EBT purchases and uphold
13 confidentiality in processing beneficiary personal and sensitive information, in compliance with the
14 Digital Privacy Act.

15 **SECTION 11. *Capacity Building.*** — The DSWD shall organize community assemblies
16 focusing on health, nutrition education, and mentoring sessions to enhance beneficiary productivity
17 and compliance with program requirements.

18 **SECTION 12. *Employment of Beneficiaries.*** — Beneficiaries are encouraged to participate
19 in job fairs, vocational training, livelihood programs, and community-based employment initiatives
20 facilitated by the DSWD, DOLE, and TESDA.

21 Assistance in processing job requirements shall be provided to household beneficiaries.

22 **SECTION 13. *Role of the Local Government Units.*** — Local government units (“LGUs”)
23 are tasked with collaborating with the DSWD in identifying, selecting beneficiaries, and monitoring
24 program compliance within their respective jurisdictions.

25 **SECTION 14. *Tax Liability.*** — Transactions under this Act shall be subject to tax under
26 the National Internal Revenue Code (“NIRC”), except if the sale involves agricultural and marine
27 products, livestock, or poultry of a kind, sale of food items to Senior Citizens and Persons with
28 Disability, or where the sale of food items have a gross annual sale and/or receipts do not exceed the
29 amount of Three Million Pesos (₱3,000,000.00) which are exempted from value-added tax under
30 Section 109(1) of the NIRC.

1 No provision of this Act shall prejudice the rights of the merchants, retailers, and beneficiary-
2 holders under the NIRC.

3 **SECTION 15. *Technical Working Group.*** — A technical working group shall be formed to
4 formulate the rules and regulations governing the implementation of this Act. It shall be presided by
5 the Secretary of DSWD or his or her representative, and co-chaired by the Secretary of DOLE or his
6 or her representative.

7 The following government agencies shall be the members of the group: DA, DTI, DOH,
8 Department of Science and Technology (“DOST”), Department of
9 Information and Communications Technology (“DICT”), and the National Privacy Commission
10 (“NPC”).

11 **SECTION 16. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** — Within six (6) months from the
12 effectivity of this Act, the Secretary of DSWD and the technical working group shall promulgate the
13 necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

14 **SECTION 17. *Appropriations.*** — The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act
15 shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

16 **SECTION 18. *Separability Clause.*** If, for any reason, any section of this Act shall be
17 deemed unconstitutional and invalid, the other sections or provisions hereof shall not be affected and
18 shall remain in force and effect.

19 **SECTION 19. *Repealing Clause.*** — All laws, executive orders, decrees, instructions, rules,
20 and regulations, contrary to or inconsistent with any provisions of this Act are repealed or amended
21 accordingly.

22 **SECTION 20. *Effectivity.*** — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication
23 in the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation.

24 *Approved,*