

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 655



Introduced by Rep. Cielo Krisel B. Lagman

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The overwhelming majority of Filipino marriages are happy, enduring, and loving. These marriages have no need for the divorce law. But an absolute divorce law is still urgently necessary in marriages which have collapsed and are beyond repair, where the majority of the victims are the wives who have been subjected to cruelty, violence, infidelity, and abandonment.

This Act is for the exceptional circumstances of married couples who are marooned in toxic, dysfunctional, and even abusive marriages, particularly for wives who suffer the torment of irreversibly dead marriages.

No bride or groom enters matrimony with negative thoughts or intent of evasion. Both believe that their love will conquer any and all odds that they may face during their union.

Couples often remember their wedding day as one of the happiest of their lives. They exchange wedding vows with the heartfelt intent of fulfilling the pledge of lifetime commitment to one another as marriage is an occasion filled with great expectations for a future of love and happiness.

But it is a fact that some marriages break down even with the couples' resolute and repeated efforts to solve differences and reconcile.

It is well to keep in mind that divorce is not the worst thing that can happen to a family. Enduring years of physical violence, suffering emotional abuse, tolerating infidelity and disrespect, enduring contemptuous and disparaging behavior, allowing children to live in a hostile home and witness daily discord and constant conflict – these are far worse than divorce.

It has been underscored time and again by divorce advocates that there are only two sovereign States in the world where divorce is illegal – the Philippines and the Vatican City.

Other than this singular similarity, the Philippines and the Vatican City are not alike in significant factors like the following:

(a) In terms of religion, the Vatican City is 100% Catholic, and while the Philippines is predominantly Catholic, a sizeable combined percentage (21.2%) is comprised of other Christian denominations, Muslims, Buddhists, and others who profess different faiths, including indigenous Philippine folk religions.

(b) According to the 2024 provisional data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), in the first 11 months of 2024 alone, there were 294,069 registered marriages in the country. This translates to around 878 marriages per day or 36 unions per hour. Compare this to the mere 100 or so weddings officiated in the various chapels inside Vatican City in 2024 according to the National Catholic Reporter, all of which were unions between non-Vatican residents.

(c) The PSA projects the population of the Philippines by mid-2030 to be as high as over 120 million with 60.76 million males and 59.30 million females, comprising 50.63% and 49.41% of the total population, respectively. Compared to the Philippines, the Vatican has an almost microscopic female population. The World Population Review in 2025 pegs the Vatican City's population at 501 persons among whom only 25 are women whose median age is 62.5 years old. Majority, if not all of them, are nuns.

(d) An estimated 4,000 babies are born to Filipino women in the country every day but not a single baby has ever been born in the Vatican City. In fact, it does not even have a hospital.

Statistics involving women must be given due emphasis because divorce is primarily an issue of women's rights. Not being able to get out of a loveless, unhappy, even abusive marriage violates women's civil rights. The right of women to live free of physical, emotional, and psychological violence is a human right. The right of women not to live in fear is a human right. The right of women to remunerative work and economic independence is a human right. The right of women to autonomy in all aspects of their lives is a human right.

When there is physical violence in a relationship, women are almost always at the receiving end of a fist or an open palm and it is the obligation of the State to ensure this does not intensify to the use of a knife or firearm. More often than not, it is the wives who are financially dependent on their husbands and have fewer opportunities for remunerative work. Women bear the brunt of parenting and childrearing but have less social capital and civic

influence and therefore frequently opt to stay in a long-dead relationship. Men go up the social ladder faster and are almost always paid more for the same kind of work than women, which make women waver when it comes to leaving a cheating or cruel husband.

It is therefore not surprising that the history of divorce laws is intimately intertwined with the evolution of the rights of women and their increasingly changing roles in society.

When women became more educated and accomplished, they also sought more work outside the home; exercised the right to reproductive self-determination by deciding when and how often to have children; were less afraid to voice their opinions and concerns; and contributed increasingly in fields that were previously the exclusive domain of men.

When women embrace activism and become more politically and socially aware, they assert their rights more strongly – including the right to divorce their husbands, be entitled to child support, receive their rightful share in the conjugal properties, and remarry and build new lives for themselves.

As women all over the world gained more political traction, the divorce laws slowly became less skewed in favor of men and offered more protection for women and their children.

The oscillating history of divorce in the Philippines can be summed up as follows: (1) In Pre-Hispanic Philippines divorce was readily available for both men and women and was fairly routine; (2) During the Spanish colonization, absolute divorce was illegal but legal separation was allowed in very specific instances; (3) During the American Period, Act 270 was passed by the Philippine legislature allowing absolute divorce on the ground of criminal conviction for adultery on the part of the wife and concubinage on the part of the husband; (4) During the Japanese occupation, by virtue of Executive Order No. 141, divorce was allowed on 11 grounds which included, among others, adultery and concubinage, contagious disease contracted by one spouse, impotency, repeated physical violence, and slander by deed; (5) With the adoption of the Civil Code of the Philippines under the Philippine Republic absolute divorce was outlawed and only legal separation was recognized, except for Muslims where absolute divorce is allowed. (6) In the Post-EDSA period, the Family Code of the Philippines allowed legal separation, annulment of marriage, and the filing of a petition for Declaration of Nullity on the ground of psychological incapacity, and these remedies are limited, do not grant full relief, and are grossly expensive and protracted.

Thirty-eight years after the institution of the Family Code, the time is more than ripe and Filipinos are more than ready for a progressive and pro-women Philippine divorce law. In its 2024 survey on divorce, the Social Weather Stations (SWS) described the support for divorce as “moderately strong” (at 50% of respondents favoring divorce, 31% opposing it, and 17% undecided).

Critics of the divorce bill must be disabused from the notion that absolute divorce will destroy marriage. It is important to remember that in divorce proceedings, there is no more marriage to protect or union to destroy because the marriage has long perished. Paraphrasing the language of the Supreme Court in *Te vs. Te* (G.R. No. 161793, February 13, 2009), the severance of the marriage bond is a decent interment of a long-dead marriage.

Notwithstanding the adoption in the 1987 Constitution of the precepts that marriage is a social institution, is the foundation of the family, and is inviolable, the Commissioners of the 1986 Constitutional Commission were unanimous that the Congress is not prohibited or precluded from instituting absolute divorce and dissolution of marriage under the current Charter.

Verily, this proposed legislation is constitutional and necessary to give full relief to couples in intolerable and irreconcilable conditions, which full relief is not available under legal separation, annulment of marriage, and declaration of nullity of marriage under the Family Code of the Philippines which are prohibitive and longwinded.

The institution of absolute divorce does not temporize the steadfast commitment of the State to protect and preserve marriage as a social institution and as the foundation of the family. This bill provides for clear and categorical safeguards for the preservation and protection of marriage. Despite the State’s continuous efforts to protect and preserve marriage as a social institution and as the foundation of the family, shattered marriages beyond rehabilitation happen due to human failings and frailties.

But when a marriage totally breaks down and reconciliation is nil, it is also the duty of the State to afford relief to the spouses in irreconcilable relations and bail them and their children out of the tempest of incessant discord.

The State cannot abandon couples and their children in a house on fire.

Love, trust, and respect, which are the veritable foundations of marriage and family, are voluntary, mutual and earned. When they are lost, no amount of compulsion by statute, custom or religion can restore their value.

Moreover, during the 17th Congress several divorce bills were extensively debated on and eventually passed by the House of Representatives on third reading. During the 18th Congress, various divorce bills were again deliberated on. Numerous stakeholders, both pro- and anti-divorce were earnestly consulted; two technical working group meetings were held to consolidate the bills and introduce amendments; and a substitute bill was finalized in August 2021.

During the 19th Congress, the Committee on Population and Family Relations overwhelmingly approved the divorce bill on 21 March 2023 and the House of Representatives once more approved the divorce bill on 22 May 2024 after lengthy and comprehensive plenary debates.

Divorce is not an affront to happy marriages; it is a long-awaited lifeline for those whose marriages have plummeted into the hell of desertion, cruelty, infidelity, and bereft of the love and respect that sustain all human relationships.

The foregoing are the reasons why absolute divorce must be available as an option.

The approval of this measure is earnestly sought.


CIELO KRISEL B. LAGMAN



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 55

Introduced by Representative Cielo Krisel B. Lagman

AN ACT
REINSTITUTING ABSOLUTE DIVORCE AS AN ALTERNATIVE MODE FOR
THE DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

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

SECTION 1. Short Title. - This Act shall be known as the "Absolute Divorce Act."

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. – While the State continues to protect and preserve marriage as a social institution and as the foundation of the family, it shall also give the opportunity to spouses in irremediably failed marriages to secure an absolute divorce decree as an alternative mode for the dissolution of an irreparably broken or dysfunctional marriage under limited grounds and well-defined judicial procedures; save the children from the pain, stress, and agony consequent to their parents' constant marital clashes or irreconcilable differences; and grant the divorced spouses the right to marry again.

To this end, the State shall adopt a divorce policy in keeping with the fundamental freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution, the rights guaranteed under Republic Act No. 9710, otherwise known as "The Magna Carta of Women", the

provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international human rights instruments of which the Philippines is a party.

SEC. 3. Guiding Principles. – The following shall be the guiding principles of this Act:

- a) Absolute divorce shall be judicially decreed after the fact of an irremediably broken marriage.
- b) The State shall assure that the court proceedings for the grant of absolute divorce shall be affordable and expeditious.
- c) Concerned spouses shall have the option to file for absolute divorce under this Act or seek legal separation, annulment of marriage or nullification of marriage under the pertinent provisions of Executive Order No. 209, otherwise known as the Family Code of the Philippines.
- d) The option of absolute divorce is a pro-woman legislation because in most cases, it is the wife who is entitled to a divorce as a liberation from an abusive relationship and to help her regain dignity and self-esteem.
- e) A sixty-day cooling-off period is instituted after the filing of a petition for absolute divorce to ensure a final attempt at reconciliation of the concerned spouses.
- f) A divorce decree shall include provisions for the care, custody, and support of children, protection of their legitime, termination and liquidation of the conjugal partnership of gains or the absolute community, and alimony for the offended spouse.
- g) Even as absolute divorce is reinstated, the State has the mandate of strengthening marriage and family life by undertaking, among others, relevant pre-nuptial and post-matrimonial programs and activities adequately funded by the government.

SEC. 4. Definition of Terms. – As used in this Act:

- a) Abandonment refers to the act of a spouse leaving the conjugal home

without justifiable cause and with a deliberate intention of creating a perpetual separation. The desertion amounts to an absolute cessation of marital relations, rights and duties. The abandonment may also be physical estrangement, or financial desertion;

b) Absolute divorce refers to the judicial dissolution of a marriage or the termination of the bond of matrimony where the spouses return to their status of being single with the right to contract marriage again;

c) Alcoholism refers to excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages at a level that interferes with physical or mental health, and social, family, or occupational responsibilities;

d) Alimony refers to spousal support adjudged in the divorce decree by the proper Family Court in favor of the offended spouse against the offending spouse;

e) Bigamous marriage refers to a second or subsequent marriage contracted before the former marriage has been legally dissolved, or before the absent spouse has been declared presumptively dead by means of a judgment rendered in the proper proceedings;

f) Child refers to a common child of the spouses below eighteen (18) years of age or older but is incapable of taking care of or protecting oneself from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation and/or discrimination because of physical infirmity or mental disability, and shall include an offspring by legal adoption or one whose custody and care is judicially decreed to be given to a guardian. In the proper cases, a child also refers to an offspring of one of the spouses;

g) Child custody refers to the parental authority and care of a child as decreed by a competent court when the parents of the child are divorced;

h) Child support refers to a method of compensating a parent needing financial support for raising and sheltering a child or children by the other parent who has the means to pay for the expenses associated with child support. The proper Family Court shall determine the amount of support, based on the financial capacity of the parent giving support and the needs of the child or children requiring support pursuant to the provisions of the Family Code of the Philippines;

i) Chronic gambling refers to an impulse control disorder in which a person makes habitual waging in games of chance which compromise, disrupt or damage family, work and social relations, and vocational pursuits;

j) Competent court refers to the proper Family Court established under Republic Act No. 8369, or the "Family Courts Act of 1997", which shall exercise jurisdiction both over the absolute divorce proceeding and the persons of the petitioner and respondent spouses;

k) Court-assisted petitioner refers to a petitioner-spouse who has personal and real properties collectively not exceeding Two million five hundred thousand pesos (PhP2,500,000.00);

l) Domestic or marital abuse refers to violence or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse by the other which may be committed through:

- (1) physical violence,
- (2) psychological and emotional violence,
- (3) sexual violence, or
- (4) economic abuse;
- (5)

m) Drug addiction refers to habitual dependence on a prohibited drug or drugs;

n) Irreconcilable differences refer to the substantial incompatibility of the spouses due to their intransigence or fault by holding on to divergent and divisive behavior resulting in the total breakdown of their marriage which could not be repaired despite earnest efforts to reconcile;

o) Joint petition refers to the legal action filed by both spouses based on the grounds subject to summary judicial proceedings under Section 11 of this Act;

p) Legitime refers to the portion of a parent's estate from which they cannot disinherit the children, without sufficient legal cause;

q) Marital infidelity refers to the extramarital sexual relations of a spouse, which shall include having or bearing a child with a third party;

r) Offended spouse refers to the spouse who is aggrieved or innocent as found by the proper Family Court;

s) Offending spouse refers to the spouse found by the Family Court to have given the cause or reason for the divorce;

t) Overseas Filipinos refer to Filipino migrant workers, other Filipino nationals and their dependents abroad or as defined under Sec. 3 of Republic Act No. 8042, as amended, otherwise known as the "Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995";

u) Psychological incapacity refers to the condition provided for in Article 36 of the Family Code of the Philippines which warrants the nullification of a marriage;

v) Separation refers to the absolute cessation of marital relations, duties, and rights, with the intention of perpetually living apart;

w) Sex reassignment surgery refers to the procedure by which a person's physical appearance and function of primary sex characteristics are altered to resemble that of the identified or preferred gender;

x) Summary judicial proceedings refer to an expeditious manner of resolving a petition for divorce without regard to technical rules and the petitioner is given the option to be assisted or not by a lawyer. The proper Family Court may allow presentation of evidence ex parte as warranted by circumstances. The decision shall be immediately final and executory;

y) Support refers to the amount indispensable for sustenance, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and other allied needs, consistent with the financial capacity and social standing of the family;

z) Transgender refers to a person whose gender identity or expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex at birth;

aa) Transsexual refers to a person who emotionally and psychologically feels that one belongs to the opposite sex, and who opts for a transition from one sex to another through the use of hormones or surgical procedure.

SEC. 5. Grounds for Absolute Divorce. – The following are the grounds for a judicial decree of absolute divorce:

a) The grounds for legal separation under Article 55 of the Family Code of the Philippines, modified, as follows:

(1) Physical violence or grossly abusive conduct directed against the petitioner, a common child, or a child of the petitioner;

(2) Physical violence or moral pressure to compel the petitioner to change religious or political affiliation;

(3) Attempt of respondent to corrupt or induce the petitioner, a common child, or a child of the petitioner, to engage in prostitution, or connivance in such corruption or inducement;

(4) Final judgment sentencing the respondent to imprisonment of more than six (6) years, even if pardoned;

(5) Drug addiction or habitual alcoholism or chronic gambling of the respondent;

(6) Homosexuality of the respondent;

(7) Contracting by the respondent of a subsequent bigamous marriage, whether in the Philippines or abroad;

(8) Marital infidelity or perversion or having a child with another person other than one's spouse during the marriage, except when upon the mutual agreement of the spouses, a child is born to them through in vitro fertilization or a similar procedure or when the wife bears a child after being a victim of rape;

(9) Attempt by the respondent against the life of the petitioner, a common child or a child of the petitioner; or

(10) Abandonment of petitioner by respondent without justifiable cause for more than one (1) year.

When the spouses are legally separated by judicial decree for more than two (2) years, either spouse can petition the proper Family Court for an absolute divorce based on said judicial decree of legal separation.

b) Grounds for annulment of marriage under Article 45 of the Family Code of the Philippines, modified, as follows:

(1) The party in whose behalf it is sought to have the marriage annulled was eighteen (18) years of age or over but below twenty-one (21), and the marriage was solemnized without the consent of the parents, guardian or person having substitute parental authority over the party, in that order, unless after attaining the age of twenty-one (21), such party freely cohabited with the other and both lived together as husband and wife;

(2) Either party was of unsound mind, unless such party after coming to reason, freely cohabited with the other as husband and wife;

(3) The consent of either party was obtained by fraud, unless such party afterwards, with full knowledge of the facts constituting the fraud, freely cohabited with the other as husband and wife;

(4) The consent of either party was obtained by force, intimidation or undue influence, unless the same having disappeared or ceased, such party thereafter freely cohabited with the other as husband and wife;

(5) Either party was physically incapable of consummating the marriage with the other, and such incapacity continues or appears to be incurable; or

(6) Either party was afflicted with a sexually transmissible infection found to be serious or appears to be incurable:

Provided, That the grounds mentioned in Subsection b) paragraphs 2, 5 and 6 herein existed either at the time of the marriage or supervenes after the marriage;

c. When the spouses have been separated in fact for at least five (5) years at the time the petition for absolute divorce is filed, and reconciliation is highly improbable;

d. Psychological incapacity of either spouse as provided for in Article 36 of the Family Code of the Philippines, whether or not the incapacity existed at the time of the marriage or supervenes after the marriage;

e. When one of the spouses undergoes a sex reassignment surgery or transitions from one sex to another, the other spouse is entitled to petition for absolute divorce with the transgender or transsexual as respondent, or vice versa;

f. Irreconcilable differences as defined in Sec. 4. Definition of Terms, Subsection n; and

g) Other forms of domestic or marital abuse as defined under Sec. 4. Definition of Terms, Subsection I.

The grant of absolute divorce based on domestic or marital abuse or violation of Republic Act No. 9262, otherwise known as the "Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004" shall be without prejudice to the prosecution of the offending or errant spouse under the said Act.

SEC. 6. Civil Recognition of a Valid Foreign Divorce. - A valid foreign divorce secured by either the alien or Filipino spouse has the effect of a divorce under this Act without going through the judicial process. Said foreign divorce must be authenticated by the Philippine Consul in or proximate to the foreign country where it was secured, and subsequently registered with the proper Civil Registry Office in the Philippines or the Office of the Philippine Consul abroad where the Filipino spouse is residing.

SEC. 7. Valid Canonical or Church Dissolution, or Declaration of Nullity of Marriage. - A marriage which is nullified or dissolved by the proper matrimonial tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church or any other recognized religious sect or denomination shall be granted civil recognition as if a divorce had been granted in accordance with the provisions of this Act, without going through the judicial process when it is authenticated by the proper authorities of the Roman Catholic Church or any other recognized religious sect or denomination, and registered with the proper Civil Registry Office in the Philippines.

SEC. 8. Prescription of Action. - A petition for absolute divorce shall be filed with the proper Family Court by the petitioner or joint petitioners within ten (10) years from the occurrence or discovery of the cause for divorce or from the effectivity of the Absolute Divorce Act, whichever comes later.

SEC. 9. Procedure for Obtaining Absolute Divorce. - a) The established and recognized procedures for securing legal separation, annulment of marriage, and nullification of marriage under the Family Code of the Philippines, as far as practicable and not in conflict with this Act, shall govern the process of obtaining a judicial decree of absolute divorce from the proper Family Court which shall be commenced by the filing of a verified petition for absolute divorce by the petitioner-spouse or joint petitioner-spouses.

b) The factors and grounds which militate against the grant of legal separation, the annulment of marriage, and nullification of marriage as provided for in the Family Code of the Philippines shall likewise be assessed, based on competent and credible proof, against the grant of absolute divorce.

c) When the application as a court-assisted petitioner is approved, the proper Family Court shall waive the payment of filing fees and other costs of litigation, and shall appoint a counsel de oficio for the court-assisted petitioner and assign such number of social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, as may be necessary from a pool of accredited social workers and practitioners recognized by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), to assist the said petitioner and the court free of charge, and assist the children of the parties.

d) All creditors of the conjugal partnership of gains or absolute community, as well as the personal creditors of the spouses, shall be listed in the petition for absolute divorce and notified of the filing thereof. The court shall take measures to protect the creditors and other persons with pecuniary interest.

e) No decree of absolute divorce shall be based upon a stipulation of facts or a confession of judgment.

f) Public prosecutors in provinces, cities and capital towns are mandated to conduct investigations to find out whether or not there is collusion between the spouses in a petition for absolute divorce or a spouse has coerced the other to file the petition and shall report their findings to the proper Family Court within sixty (60) days from the filing of the petition.

SEC. 10. Overseas Filipinos. – Petitioners who are overseas Filipinos shall be given priority by the proper Family Court with respect to the hearing of their petitions and the court shall set the reception of evidence, upon the availability of the petitioners, for not more than two (2) consecutive days.

SEC. 11. Summary Judicial Proceedings. – The following grounds for absolute divorce may be subject to summary judicial proceedings as defined in Sec. 4. Definition of Terms, Subsection x:

- a) When the spouses have been separated de facto for at least five (5) years;
- b) When one of the spouses has contracted a bigamous marriage;
- c) When the spouses have been legally separated by judicial decree for at least two (2) years;

- d) When one of the spouses has been sentenced to imprisonment for at least six (6) years, even if subsequently pardoned; or
- e) When one of the spouses has undergone a sex reassignment surgery or has transitioned into another sex.

A petition under this section may be filed individually or jointly by the concerned spouses.

SEC. 12. Mandatory Sixty-Day Cooling-off Period. – Except for grounds under summary judicial proceedings, the proper Family Court shall exercise all efforts to reunite and reconcile the concerned spouses during the sixty-day cooling-off period after the filing of the petition. Upon expiration of the cooling-off period without the parties having reconciled, the court shall immediately commence trial and is mandated to decide the petition within one (1) year after the lapse of the sixty-day cooling-off period.

The requirement of a cooling-off period shall not apply in cases which involve acts of violence against women and their children under Republic Act No. 9262 or attempt against the life of the other spouse or a common child or a child of the petitioner. The cooling-off period is not required for petitions under summary judicial proceedings.

SEC. 13. Waiver of Expert Testimony. – Expert testimony shall be dispensed with unless the proper Family Court decides that such testimony is indispensable in deciding the petition for divorce.

SEC. 14. Effects of Absolute Divorce. – The decree of absolute divorce shall have the following effects:

- a) The marriage is dissolved and the divorced spouses shall have the right to contract marriage again;
- b) The custody of the minor children, and the visitation rights of the spouse not granted primary custody, shall be decided by the proper Family Court in accordance with the best interests of the children, subject to the provisions of Article 213 of the Family Code of the Philippines taking into primary consideration that no child under seven (7) years of age shall be separated from the mother, unless the proper court finds compelling reasons to order otherwise. When the child is over the age of seven (7), the court may ask the child's preference with respect to parental custody and visitation unless such preference will not be for the best interest of the child. In no case shall child custody be given to the

offending spouse when the grounds for divorce fall under Section 5 (a 1, 2,4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10) of this Act;

Provided, That in a subsequent divorce of a previously divorced spouse, the custody of children may be granted to the spouse with lesser number of children, subject to the discretion of the Family Court;

c) Unless otherwise agreed upon in a marriage settlement executed before the celebration of the marriage, the conjugal partnership of gains or the absolute community shall be dissolved and liquidated and the assets shall be equally divided between the spouses excluding the paraphernal or exclusive properties of either spouse, in accordance with the Family Code of the Philippines. The recognition and delivery of the presumptive legitime to the common children shall be ordered by the court, taking into consideration the interests of the children and the protection of their legitime from dissipation. The presumptive legitime shall be computed as of the date of the finality of the decree of absolute divorce. The partition and distribution of the properties of the spouses and the delivery of the children's presumptive legitime shall be recorded in the appropriate civil registry and registry of deeds, otherwise the same shall not affect third persons;

d) During the pendency of the divorce proceedings, the liabilities of the spouses to creditors for family expenses shall remain solidary;

e) In addition to the equal share in the assets of the absolute community or conjugal partnership, the offended spouse who is not gainfully employed shall be entitled to spousal support or alimony from the offending spouse: Provided, That the support shall not exceed three (3) years from the finality of the decree of absolute divorce and shall cease when the offended spouse secures gainful employment or remarries: Provided further, That the right to support shall be subject to the provisions of Article 201 of the Family Code of the Philippines where the amount of support shall be in proportion to the resources or means of the obligor and to the necessities of the obligee;

Provided, finally, That the three (3)-year support period may be extended to a reasonable period of time by the Family Court when the offended spouse entitled to support is a senior citizen, a person with disability, or has limited educational attainment;

f) The proper Family Court shall have the discretion to grant spousal support or alimony, child support and child custody pursuant to the pertinent provisions of the Family Code of the Philippines, and impose contempt of court against the defaulting

parties. The necessity of alimony and the amount shall be determined by the court taking into consideration all relevant factors;

g) The offended spouse may revoke the donations made in favor of the offending spouse, as well as the designation of the latter as a beneficiary in any insurance policy, even if such designation be stipulated as irrevocable.

Donations by reason of marriage shall remain valid, except if the donee is the offending spouse under any of the grounds under Sec. 5 a) of this Act. The revocation of the donations shall be recorded in the registries of properties in the places where the properties are located. Alienations, liens and encumbrances registered in good faith before the recording of the complaint for revocation in the registry of property shall be respected. The revocation of or a change in the designation of the insurance beneficiary shall take effect upon written notification thereof to the beneficiary. The action to revoke the donation under this provision must be brought within five (5) years from the time the decree of absolute divorce has become final;

h) The effects on the divorced spouses with respect to intestate succession, testamentary dispositions, donations and insurance provisions on beneficiaries in accordance with the Family Code of the Philippines and jurisprudence shall be observed;

i) The legitimate and adopted children of divorced parents shall retain their legal status and legitimacy; a child conceived or born within three hundred (300) days after the filing of a petition for absolute divorce shall be considered legitimate, unless the ground for divorce is the marital infidelity of the wife; and

j) After the filing of the petition for divorce, the spouses shall be entitled to live separately. The court shall appoint a competent third party as administrator to manage the absolute community or conjugal partnership property during the pendency of the divorce proceedings in order to prevent dissipation of the common properties. Prior to the discharge of the administrator's functions and duties, the administrator shall post a surety bond approved by the proper Family Court. The administrator shall have the same powers and duties as those of a guardian under the Rules of Court.

SEC. 15. Support for Children. – The proper Family Court shall provide for child support pursuant to the pertinent provisions of the Family Code. The court shall give the paramount consideration to the best interest of the children in accordance with Article 194 of the Family Code of the Philippines.

In considering the award of support, the proper Family Court shall consider relevant circumstances of the case, and of the parties. On application of either party, the proper Family Court may order an increase or decrease in the amount of support upon showing of a substantial and material change of circumstances.

In case the offending spouse is an overseas Filipino, a copy of the order to grant spousal and child support shall be furnished to the Department of Migrant Workers and the overseas Filipino's employer for compliance.

SEC. 16. Custody and Support Pendente Lite. - During the pendency of the petition and in the absence of adequate provisions in a written agreement between the spouses, the court, upon application of the proper party, shall provide for spousal support, and the custody and support of their common children. The court shall give the paramount consideration to the best interest of the children, as well as their choice of the parent with whom they wish to remain, in accordance with the Family Code of the Philippines. It shall also provide the appropriate visitation rights of the other parent.

SEC. 17. Award for Damages. - The proper Family Court may, as warranted by evidence, award actual, moral, and exemplary damages as provided for under the Civil Code of the Philippines to the offended spouse against the offending spouse.

SEC. 18. Conversion of Pending Petitions. - Parties who have pending petitions under Articles 36, 45, and 55 of the Family Code of the Philippines may convert their petitions to an action for absolute divorce under this Act without paying filing fees.

SEC. 19. Reconciliation During the Pendency of the Divorce Proceedings. - If the spouses agree to reconcile during the pendency of the divorce proceedings or before the finality of judgment of divorce, a corresponding joint manifestation under oath duly signed by them shall be filed with the same court where the petition for absolute divorce was filed.

Upon hearing of the joint manifestation and the court finds it in order, the petition for divorce shall be dismissed.

SEC 20. Reconciliation After the Finality of the Divorce Decree. - Even after the divorce decree is final, the former spouses may agree to reconcile by filing a joint manifestation before the proper Family Court which issued the divorce decree. Upon hearing of the joint manifestation and the court finds it in order, the court shall nullify the final decree of divorce and the parties shall live together without the need of contracting a new marriage.

SEC 21. Guidelines and Parameters for Reconciliation. – The following shall be the guidelines or parameters for reconciliation:

a) Any reconciliation during the pendency of the divorce proceedings or after the finality of the divorce decree shall protect the interests of the concerned children;

b) The proper Family Court shall exercise due discretion as warranted by evidence which must protect the offended spouse or the children from future or recurrence of violence from the offending spouse whether or not to grant the joint manifestation of reconciliation in the following:

(1) Cases which involve acts of violence against women and their children under R.A. No. 9262; and

(2) Cases on attempt against the life of the offended spouse, a common child, or a child of the offended spouse;

c) When the decree of absolute divorce is nullified upon reconciliation of the parties, the separation of property or any forfeiture of the share of the offending spouse already effected shall subsist, unless the spouses agree to revive their former property regime;

d) The reconciling spouses shall also submit a plan of reconciliation under oath which shall include the following:

(1) The properties to be contributed anew to the restored regime;

(2) The properties to be retained as separate properties of each spouse;

(3) The names of all their known creditors, their addresses, and the amounts owing to each;

(4) The joint manifestation and verified plan of reconciliation shall be furnished to the creditors named therein;

(5) After due hearing, the court shall issue an order approving the joint manifestation and plan of reconciliation which order shall include the protection of the interest of creditors;

(6) The order shall be registered in the proper registry of deeds; and

(7) The recording of the order in the proper registry of deeds shall not prejudice any creditor not listed or notified.

SEC. 22. Penalty. – A spouse who is a party to a petition for absolute divorce and who is found by the court to have used threats or coercion to compel the other spouse in filing the petition, and spouses who are guilty of collusion, shall be punished with imprisonment of five (5) years and a fine of Three hundred thousand pesos (PhP300,000.00).

Any offending spouse in default of providing the required spousal support or alimony and child support under this Act shall be charged with contempt of court and be imposed a fine of:

- a) Fifty thousand pesos (P50,000.00) for the first default,
- b) One hundred thousand pesos (P100,000.00) for the second default, and
- c) Two hundred thousand pesos (P200,000.00) each for the third and the succeeding defaults.

The offending spouse found guilty of indirect contempt of court shall be punished with imprisonment thereupon until the obligation for spousal and/or child support has been paid.

SEC. 23. Options. – The concerned spouse shall have the option to file a petition for dissolution of marriage, annulment of marriage, or legal separation under Articles 36, 45, and 55, respectively, of the Family Code of the Philippines or a petition or joint petition for absolute divorce under this Act.

SEC. 24. Appeals. – Within fifteen (15) calendar days from receipt of the decree of absolute divorce, any of the spouses may file an appeal with the Court of Appeals under the pertinent provisions of the Rules of Court.

A motion for execution pending appeal may be issued by the Court of Appeals upon application of the appellee. Moreover, the Court of Appeals may dismiss an appeal forthwith once it finds the same frivolous.

SEC. 25. Community-Based Pre-Nuptial and Post-Matrimonial Programs and Activities. – The National Government shall, through the DSWD, implement community-based pre-nuptial, reconciliatory phase or cooling-off counseling, and post-matrimonial programs and activities aimed at strengthening the marital and family life of Filipinos.

These social welfare interventions, which will protect the stability of Filipino families, shall be instituted by DSWD in provinces, cities and clusters of municipalities in

the entire country, while observing the local cultures and customs that are prevalent in each locality.

SEC. 26. Community-Based Women's Desk. – The frontline desk in every barangay established under Republic Act No. 9710 shall be readily available and easily accessible to provide support and assistance to victims, especially women, of all forms of abuse and acts of violence identified under the said Act and those provided for under Republic Act No. 9262.

SEC. 27. Attorney's Fees. – Subject to the plenary authority of the Supreme Court to regulate the practice of law, in petitions with no court-assisted petitioner, the attorney's fees, inclusive of acceptance fee, appearance fees, and success fee, shall not exceed Fifty thousand pesos (P50,000) for the entire proceedings. However, the petitioner and counsel can mutually agree on a higher rate of attorney's fees.

SEC. 28. Creation of More Positions of Public Attorneys and Family Courts. – The Department of Justice is authorized to create the necessary additional positions for public attorneys under the Public Attorney's Office to advocate for court-assisted petitioners.

In the discretion of the Supreme Court, more Family Courts may be created to adjudicate petitions for absolute divorce.

SEC. 29. Congressional Oversight Committee on the Absolute Divorce Act. – There is hereby created a Congressional Oversight Committee (COC) composed of five (5) members each from the Senate and the House of Representatives. The members from the Senate and the House of Representatives shall be appointed by the Senate President and the Speaker, respectively, with at least one (1) member representing the Minority.

The COC shall be headed by the respective Chairs of the Committee on Health and Demography of the Senate and the Committee on Population and Family Relations of the House of Representatives. The Secretariat of the COC shall come from the existing Secretariat personnel of the Senate and the House of Representatives committees concerned.

The COC shall monitor and ensure the effective implementation of this Act, recommend the necessary remedial legislation or administrative measures, and shall conduct a review of this Act every five (5) years from its effectivity. The COC shall perform such other duties and functions as may be necessary to attain the objectives of this Act.

SEC. 30. Appropriations. – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be sourced from the savings of the DSWD for the current fiscal year, and the subsequent amounts necessary for the full implementation of this Act shall be included in the subsequent annual General Appropriations Acts.

SEC. 31. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – The DSWD shall, as lead agency, together with the Department of Justice, the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), and the National Youth Commission (NYC), in consultation with at least two (2) representatives from women’s organizations with proven track record in women and gender rights advocacy to be identified by the PCW, and two (2) representatives from children’s organizations with proven track record in child rights advocacy to be identified by the NYC, promulgate the implementing rules and regulations within sixty (60) days after the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 32. Separability Clause. – If any part or provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in force and effect.

SEC. 33. Repealing Clause. – All laws, executive orders, issuances, decrees, rules and regulations inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are deemed amended, modified or repealed accordingly.

SEC. 34. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,