



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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 946



Introduced by Representative Crispin Diego “Ping” D. Remulla

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM
FOR DESERVING STUDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article III, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution provides that, “No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws.” In addition, Article III, Section 11 affirms that, “Free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.” These provisions underscore the State’s obligation to ensure that all Filipinos, regardless of their economic status, have access to justice and experience full protection under the law.

However, this fundamental right remains out of reach for many, especially those in marginalized and underserved communities who lack access to legal services. While the Public Attorney’s Office (PAO) continues to serve as the primary legal aid provider for indigent clients, the increasing volume of cases has strained its resources. In 2021, PAO handled 787,124 cases and assisted 849,914 clients. This continued further in 2022, with 850,753 cases and 900,079 clients, clearly illustrating the growing demand for free legal representation across the country.

In response to this need, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) approved the creation of 178 additional plantilla positions within PAO in July 2024. The Supreme Court likewise recognized the urgency of strengthening the legal workforce and adjusted the passing threshold for the 2024 Bar Examinations to 74%, resulting in 3,962 new lawyers and increasing the passing rate to 37.84% from the previous year's 30%. While these measures are commendable, they are not sufficient to address the systemic shortage of lawyers in public service.

This proposed legislation aims to establish a Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program, providing financial assistance to deserving students who wish to pursue a legal education, subject to the condition that they will serve in government after passing the Bar. This program is designed to expand access to legal education for underprivileged yet capable individuals, while ensuring a steady supply of dedicated lawyers who will help fulfill the State's constitutional mandate to make justice accessible to all.

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



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

1 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** – This Act shall be known as the “Abogado Para sa Bayan
2 Act.”

3 **SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.*** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to uphold
4 the right to free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and ensure that adequate legal
5 assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty. Towards this end, and in
6 cognizance of the constitutional directive to provide for preventive measures and legal aid
7 services to the underprivileged whose human rights have been violated or need protection, the
8 State shall establish a legal scholarship and return service program to assist deserving students
9 pursue legal education who shall eventually render legal services in government offices.

10 **SEC. 3. *Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program.*** – There shall be established
11 a Legal Scholarship and Return Service (LSRS) Program for deserving students who intend to
12 pursue a Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or
13 in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where there are no SUC
14 offering Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree. The LSRS Program shall provide the
15 following benefits to qualified legal education students:

- 16 a) Free tuition and other school fees, including but not limited to: student registration
17 fees, library fees, and publication fees;

- b) Allowance for prescribed books and supplies;
- c) Allowance for review fees for government-mandated bar exams; and
- d) Allowance for licensure fees.

SEC. 4. *Qualifications and Requirements.* – In order to qualify for the grant of scholarship under the LSRS Program, a prospective or current legal education student must satisfy the following requirements:

- a) Must be a Filipino citizen residing in the Philippines;
- b) Must not have completed a Bachelor of Laws or Juris Doctor degree from any HEI offering legal education;
- c) Must be a graduating student or a graduate of an undergraduate degree program; and
- d) Must have passed the entrance examination and complied with other requirements for admission into the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree program offered by the SUC or private HEI where the student intends to enroll.

SEC. 5. *Conditions for the Grant of Legal Scholarship.* – Qualified students accepted into the LSRS Program shall be subject to the following conditions:

- a) Must sign an agreement stating that the terms and conditions of the scholarship which shall be prescribed by the Legal Education Board (LEB);
- b) Must carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC or private HEI concerned, and shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which would result in underloading;
- c) Must finish the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree program within the prescribed time frame of the SUC or private HEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies of the SUC or private HEI concerned: *Provided,* That a scholar who is already enrolled, may be allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, to file a leave of absence;
- d) Must take the bar examination within a maximum period of one (1) year after completion of the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree;
- e) Must render return service as provided under Section 7 of this Act.

SEC. 6. *Disqualifications.* – The scholarship grant shall terminate, and the recipient of legal scholarship shall repay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the LSRS program, in case of the following circumstances:

- 1 a) If the scholar fails to meet the academic requirements or to complete the course
2 within the prescribed period without valid cause as may be determined by the SUC
3 or private HEI concerned;
- 4 b) If the scholar commits gross misconduct in a manner that would bring significant
5 damage to the SUC or private HEI concerned or to the community as a whole.

6 **SEC. 7. *Mandatory Return Service.*** – Within three (3) years from admission to the
7 practice of law, a scholar shall render mandatory return service for four (4) years in government
8 agencies, including but not limited to: the Public Attorney’s Office, National Prosecution
9 Service, Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources,
10 Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, Department of
11 Justice, Department of National Defense, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the
12 Courts, or in government agencies and instrumentalities that provide legal services to (i) poor
13 and marginalized individuals and communities; and (ii) public school teachers, public health
14 workers and military and uniformed personnel involved in cases arising from or in connection
15 with the performance of their duties and functions: *Provided*, That the mandatory return service
16 shall be separate and distinct from the Clinical Legal Education Program as provided under
17 Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court: *Provided, further*, That beneficiaries of LSRS program
18 appointed to plantilla positions shall receive the appropriate salaries, benefits and other
19 emoluments for services rendered under the mandatory return service; *Provided, furthermore*,
20 That beneficiaries of LSRS Program who, after three (3) years from admission to the practice
21 of law, fails to secure appointment in government shall have the option to: (i) pay the full cost
22 of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the
23 participation in the LSRS Program; or (ii) undertake alternative compliance program to be
24 formulated by the LEB pursuant to the provisions of this Act and Republic Act No. 9999,
25 otherwise known as the Free Legal Assistance Act of 2010: *Provided, finally*, That in the
26 application of Republic Act No. 9999, the allowable deduction from the gross income shall be
27 the amount that could have been collected from the actual free legal services rendered or up to
28 twenty percent (20%) of the gross income derived from the actual performance of the legal
29 profession, whichever is lower.

30 **SEC. 8. *Number and Allocation of Students to be Admitted in the Program.*** – Prior
31 to the implementation of this Act and every five (5) years thereafter, the LEB shall, in
32 consultation with the Philippine Association of Law Schools and participating HEIs and upon
33 the assessment of the shortage of legal practitioners in the public sector, determine the
34 appropriate number and geographic allocation of scholars to be admitted in the LSRS Program.

1 **SEC. 9. *Harmonization with the Clinical Legal Education Program.*** – Pursuant to
2 Article VIII, Section 5, subsection 5 of the Constitution, the Legal Education Board shall adopt
3 the policy on the Revised Law Student Practice Rule, ensure that law students participate in
4 the clinical legal education programs in all legal education institutions, define the scope of
5 service to be rendered by law students in the said program, contribute to access to justice of the
6 marginalized sectors, enhance learning opportunities of law students, instill among them social
7 responsibility and awareness, and prepare them for the practice of law.

8 **SEC. 10. *Sanctions.*** – Any lawyer who has availed of the benefits under the LSRS
9 Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service as provided under
10 this Act shall be required to pay twice the amount of scholarship, including other benefits
11 received by reason of participation in the LSRS program: *Provided, That* the penalty imposed
12 herein shall not apply to lawyers who fail to comply with the required return service by reason
13 of *force majeure* or not due to their fault or negligence.

14 **SEC. 11. *Appropriations.*** – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act
15 shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

16 **SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within sixty (60) days from the
17 effectivity of this Act, the LEB shall, in consultation with the Philippine Association of Law
18 Schools, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and Commission on Higher
19 Education, promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this
20 Act.

21 **SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or
22 unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected thereby shall remain
23 in full force and effect.

24 **SEC. 14. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations
25 and other issuances or parts thereof which are contrary to or inconsistent with this Act are
26 hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

27 **SEC. 15. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect immediately following its publication
28 in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,