

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 2212



Introduced by **Representative Ryan S. Recto**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This legislative measure seeks to institute a National Autism Care Plan (NACP) for the support of Persons with Autism (PWAs) in order to protect and promote the rights of these individuals to a full, healthy and holistic life. The proposed bill also mandates the recognition of PWAs as persons with disabilities (PWDs) and therefore entitle them to the same range of benefits and protection under existing laws.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a broad range of conditions that affects communication and behavior. These usually appear by age two (2). People living with autism find difficulty with communication and social interaction, have restricted interests and possess repetitive behaviors. They often have a “world of their own” and seek to find meaning through routine. This may result in challenges at work, school and other areas in life. Autism, however, varies per individual and may manifest differently depending on the level of severity.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism usually affects 1 in 36 children. In the Philippines, it was reported that one in a hundred Filipinos are on the spectrum. This translates to around 1.2 million of our fellow countrymen.¹ Many Filipinos grapple with the lifelong development challenges that are accompanied by ASD. Some, however, go undiagnosed due to lack of awareness, stigma and inaccessibility to diagnostic services.

The urgency of this measure cannot be overstated. The country currently lacks a national surveillance program to diagnose and protect those living with autism. This seemingly lack of such makes it rather difficult for government agencies as well as the private sector to assess the prevalence of autism as well as further study ASD. Agencies therefore cannot formulate an effective plan and allocate the proper resources necessary for its services.

Compounding these challenges, while Republic Act No. 7277, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, exists, Persons with Autism (PWAs) are not formally recognized as a distinct disability category under the law. This critical

¹ Autism Society of the Philippines.

oversight often leads to their exclusion from the full range of benefits and protections intended for the disability sector. Similarly, the Department of Health does not clearly list autism as a distinct disability. Instead, individuals with ASD are often categorized under more general neurological conditions, rather than specific physical or mental disabilities.

Through this proposed measure, we shall be able to mandate the comprehensive epidemiological surveys and early detection programs to ensure that all individuals are properly identified, assessed and provided with timely and appropriate interventions. With this, the true prevalence of autism in the country can be accurately determined and allocated with targeted resources and programs. The provisions of this measure shall also assure their mandatory coverage in PhilHealth programs, promote inclusive education and employment as well as the establishment of a national coordinating body to oversee the implementation of the National Autism Care Plan.

This bill is a testament of the State's commitment towards a society where all individuals are rightfully afforded their rights, dignity and equal opportunities regardless of their neurodiversity.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Recto', is positioned above the printed name.

Ryan S. Recto
Representative
6th District, Batangas

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AN ACT
INSTITUTING A PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AUTISM CARE PLAN FOR THE SUPPORT
OF PERSONS WITH AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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 “*National Autism Care*
2 *Plan Act.*”
3

4 Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* –It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
5 protect and promote the rights of all persons to full, healthy and holistic development.
6 As such, the State shall promote an environment conducive to the development of
7 persons with autism (PWAs) to become socially-accepted members of an inclusive
8 society. Towards this end, the State commits itself to the establishment of institutional
9 and social mechanisms to support PWAs throughout their lifetime, responsive to their
10 needs, empowering and providing them quality of life.
11

12 Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be
13 defined as follows:
14

- 15 a) *Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder* refers to a neurological condition
16 characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors,
17 communication, as well as by unique strengths, as defined in the latest
18 version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
19
- 20 b) *Diagnosis* refers to necessary assessments, including but not limited to
21 neuro-psychological evaluations, genetic testing, MRIs, hearing tests and
22 psychometric tests to diagnose or discount autism or developmental
23 disabilities in individuals.

1 c) *Intervention* refers to interceding action undertaken to help improve the
2 autism prognosis. Intervention in autism may take the form of medical,
3 pharmacologic, therapeutic, educational and non-traditional habilitative
4 care.

5
6 d) *Epidemiology* refers to the study and analysis of the distribution and
7 determinants of health conditions, like autism in defined populations.
8

9 Sec. 4. *Treatment as Persons with Disability.* – All PWAs shall be treated as
10 persons with disability, as defined under Republic Act No. 7277, as amended. They
11 shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and benefits provided for persons with
12 disabilities under existing laws.
13

14 Sec. 5. *Continuing Education and Training on Autism for Public Service Providers.*
15 – All officers and staff in charge of providing services to the public, including but not
16 limited to the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and
17 Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor
18 and Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of
19 Transportation (DOTr), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG),
20 Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Science and Technology
21 (DOST), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills
22 Development Authority (TESDSA), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA),
23 Persons with Disabilities Affairs offices (PDAOs) at the Local Government Units
24 (LGUs), Public Safety Units (military, police, firemen and other first responders), shall
25 undergo mandatory continuing education to sensitize and empower service
26 providers to become effective frontliners in the delivery of services to PWAs and their
27 families.
28

29 Sec. 6. *Epidemiological Surveillance Programs.* – The DOH, in coordination with
30 different academic institutions and non-governmental organizations is hereby
31 mandated to conduct an epidemiological survey to determine the prevalence of
32 autism in the country annually to provide data to government agencies and the
33 private sector, to make necessary services available to PWAs and their families.
34

35 Sec. 7. *Evidence-based Research.* – The DOH, the Philippine Council for Health
36 Research and Development (PCHRD) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) are
37 mandated, in coordination with local and international educational institutions, to
38 strengthen its research focus on autism; to invest in clinical and molecular studies
39 and grants to support the development of best practices in autism intervention in the
40 Philippines.
41

1 Sec. 8. *Early Detection and Intervention of Autism.* – The DOH, in coordination
2 with the DepEd, is hereby mandated to establish a program for early screening and
3 detection of autism, to provide the appropriate services to children and toddlers with
4 developmental delays associated with autism and to ensure the central PWD registry
5 is updated accordingly.
6

7 Sec. 9. *Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage.* – All persons with autism shall be
8 covered by the National Health Insurance Program of the Philippine Health Insurance
9 Corporation (PHIC). Funds necessary to ensure the enrollment of PWAs, who are
10 currently covered under any existing category, shall be sourced from the National
11 Health Insurance Fund of PHIC, earmarked from the proceeds of sin tax collections,
12 as provided for in Republic Act No. 10351. It shall likewise include the cost of early
13 screening and detection programs, as one of the available benefits of its members.
14

15 Sec. 10. *Protection Against Discrimination in Schools, Colleges, Universities and*
16 *Training Institutions.* – The DepEd, CHED and TESDA shall formulate or update
17 policies and protocols to ensure that all educational institutions shall be inclusive to
18 learners with autism, in matters including, but not limited to, acceptance to academic
19 or training programs, instructional supports and behavior management.
20

21 Sec. 11. *Provision for Equal Opportunities for Employment.* – The DOLE and the
22 Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall formulate policies and programs to ensure that
23 adult PWAs are provided equal opportunities for gainful employment in the private
24 and public sector.
25

26 Sec. 12. *Protection against Discrimination in Insurance Coverage.* – The
27 Department of Finance (DOF) shall formulate or update policies and protocols to
28 ensure that all insurance providers shall provide PWAs access to life insurance
29 instruments and shall include allied medical procedures (like occupational and
30 speech therapies) in health insurance benefits of policy holders.
31

32 Sec. 13. *Protection in cases of Disasters and Emergencies.* – The DILG and the
33 DND shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure the military,
34 public safety professional, LGUs and first responders shall provide the necessary life-
35 saving support to PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges.
36

37 Sec. 14. *Access to Transportation.* – The DOTr shall formulate the necessary
38 policies and protocols to ensure PWAs with behavioral and communication
39 challenges and their families are given reasonable accommodation in accessing all
40 forms of transportation by service providers over land, sea and air.
41

1 Sec. 15. *Reasonable Accommodation in cases of Legal Action.* – The DOJ shall
2 formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure criminal justice agencies
3 and professionals shall provide the necessary accommodations and protections to
4 PWAs in behavioral and communication challenges, who may be accused of, victims
5 of, or witnesses to crimes.

6
7 Sec. 16. *The Philippine Council for Mental Health.* – The Philippine Council for
8 Mental Health (PCMH), a multi-sector body established by the Mental Health Act to
9 provide for a coherent, rational and unified response to mental health in the country,
10 shall spearhead and coordinate the government actions to address the needs of
11 Filipinos with autism and their families.

12
13 Sec. 17. *The National Autism Care Plan.* – The PCMH, in coordination with other
14 government agencies and stakeholders, shall develop, regularly update and monitor
15 the implementation of the National Autism Care Plan (NACP), a holistic medium-term
16 plan to respond to the needs of PWAs and their families, such as but not limited to
17 financial assistance, therapy, medications and equipment, for the guidance of the
18 stakeholders in the public and private sectors. The PCMH shall likewise coordinate the
19 development and implementation of necessary policies and programs to
20 operationalize the NACP and to ensure the needs of PWAs are served.

21
22 Sec. 18. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of
23 this Act shall be included and incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the
24 DOH.

25
26 Sec. 19. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is declared
27 unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full
28 force and effect.

29
30 Sec. 20. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, issuances, rules and
31 regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified
32 or amended accordingly.

33 Sec. 21. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
34 publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

35
36 *Approved,*