

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session



HOUSE BILL No. 2506

Introduced by REP. RAMIL L. HERNANDEZ

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A SOCIAL WORK SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR DESERVING
STUDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill aims to establish a **Social Work scholarship and return service (SWSP) program for deserving students** under the auspices of the **Commission on Higher Education (CHED)** and the **Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)**. The **SWSP** program shall comprehensively address the dearth of Social Workers across the country.

The DSWD is the primary government agency mandated to develop, implement and coordinate social protection and poverty-reduction solutions for and with the poor, the vulnerable, and the disadvantaged. It envisions all Filipinos are freed from hunger and poverty, having equal access to opportunities that is enabled by a fair, just, and peaceful society. Social workers enable the DSWD and other social welfare entities to pursue this these lofty mandates.

In the DSWD inventory of its employees, there are 6,796 registered Social Workers as of July 31, 2022 across the country. On the other hand, according to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) there are 9,541 social welfare positions across the government bureaucracy. Of this number, there are 2,010 positions that have yet to be filled as of June 30, 2022. These posts include those for licensed Social Workers: Social Welfare Officer, Social Worker, Social Welfare and Development Officer, Provincial/City/Municipal Social Welfare Officer; and for non-licensed Social Workers: Social Welfare Assistant, and Social Welfare Aide, in National Government Agencies (NGAs) and local government units (LGUs).

The above data provides a snapshot of the shortage in the number of Social Workers urgently needed to provide dedicated service to the disadvantaged sectors and communities across the country.

This measure conceives **SWSP** program as a long-term effort to ensure the stability of the DSWD and all current and future social welfare and development entities in the

country. It likewise encourages deserving and qualified students to pursue Social Work and Development (SWD) and eventually enter into public service. The SWSP program opens up opportunities for students to engage in a fulfilling and purposeful profession, which would enable them to confront social and other socio-economic issues and thereby impact the lives of people.

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

Approved

RAMIL L. HERNANDEZ
2nd District, Laguna

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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 "Social Work Scholarship Act."

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote and develop the skills and capabilities of public social workers to make them more responsive and better equipped in delivering social welfare and development (SWD) programs and services. The State shall likewise encourage students with proper qualifications and excellent abilities to pursue social work education and eventually become social workers and be employed in the government service.

Towards this end, the State shall establish a social work scholarship program that will help deserving students pursue social work education and training, with the aim of rendering qualified and licensed professional social work services, at the DSWD Central Office, Field Offices, government hospitals, government residential care facilities, the other parts of the national government bureaucracy, to government social work offices or institutions in their respective hometowns, in any underserved municipality or city in any province, as part of their integration into the government social welfare service system.

This shall ensure the availability of qualified Social Workers in each LGU, who shall provide quality social welfare and development services from the agencies and institutions that form part of the national government bureaucracy, all the way to every municipality in the country, especially in underserved, remote, economically underdeveloped, distressed, conflict-afflicted and geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.

SECTION 3. Establishment of the Social Work Scholarship Program. - There shall be established a Social Work Scholarship Program (SWSP) Program for deserving students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in regions where there are no SUCs offering a Social Work course: *Provided*, That the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) may designate more than one (1) partner higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region, including regions where there are existing SUCs offering the Social Work programs as deemed necessary, upon consultation with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

In all cases, qualified applicants from municipalities shall be prioritized in the allocation of scholarship slots to ensure the assignment of at least one (1) Social Worker for every barangay in the country.

SECTION 4. Coverage. - The SWSP established under this Act shall be made to deserving Filipino students who want to pursue a degree in Social Work.

- a. The student financial assistance for the SWSP shall include the following:
 - i. Free tuition, miscellaneous, and other school fees;
 - ii. Allowance for prescribed books, supplies and equipment;
 - iii. Clothing or uniform allowance;
 - iv. Allowance for dormitory or boarding house accommodation;
 - v. Transportation allowance;
 - vi. On the Job Training fees and expenses, including financial assistance;
 - vii. Social Work licensure examination review fees;
 - viii. Social Work licensure examination fees;
 - ix. License fees;
 - x. Annual medical insurance; and
 - xi. Other education-related subsistence or living allowances.
- b. Qualified students under the SWSP shall also be eligible to participate in any recognized Social Work Exchange Program.

SECTION 5. Qualification Requirements. - An applicant for the SWSP shall possess the following qualifications:

- (a) Must be a Filipino citizen residing in the Philippines; and
- (b) Must have passed the entrance examination and complied with other related requirements for admission into a Social Work degree program in the SUC or PHEI where the scholar intends to enroll, as well as the other requirements of the CHED and the DSWD.

SECTION 6. Conditions for the Grant of Scholarship. - Qualified students accepted to the SWSP shall be subject to the following conditionalities:

- (a) Must sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of the scholarship on a form prescribed by the CHED and the DSWD pursuant to the provisions of this Act, which shall contain, among others, a duly executed Affidavit of No Existing Scholarship Grant or With Return Service Obligation to ensure the student's full participation in the SWSP;
- (b) Must carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC or PHEI, and shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which will result in underloading;
- (c) Must not incur a grade below eighty (80) percent or its grade equivalent in all of the degree program's major subjects, and not incur a failing grade in all of the degree program's minor subjects;
- (c) Must undertake the mandatory practical training hours and finish the entire social work degree program within the prescribed time frame of the SUC or the PHEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies of the SUC or the PHEI: *Provided*, That the deserving student accepted to the SWSP, before actual enrollment in the first semester as a scholar, may be allowed for valid and justifiable reasons, as determined by the CHED, to defer enrollment or to file a leave of absence: *Provided, further*, That a scholar who is already enrolled, may be

allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, as determined by the CHED, to file a leave of absence;

(e) Must take the board examination within a maximum period of one (1) year after graduation; and

(f) Must render return of service as provided under Section 8 of this Act.

The scholar who fails to pass the licensure examination within one (1) year after graduation and completion of the mandatory practical training hours and other academic requirements shall shoulder all the necessary expenses for the succeeding professional licensure examinations.

SECTION 7. Disqualification. - The scholarship grant shall terminate and the scholar shall repay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the scholarship program in case of the following circumstances:

(a) If the scholar fails to comply, or violates the conditions for the grant of the scholarship as provided under Section 6 of this Act;

(b) If the scholar accepts another scholarship from other government or private agency or entity while enjoying the benefits under this Act;

(c) If the scholar fails to meet the academic requirements, as stated in Section 6 (c); or fails to complete the course within the prescribed period without valid cause, as may be determined by the SUC or PHEI, or CHED or DSWD through appropriate regulations, such as, but not limited to, absence without notice, willful neglect or other causes within the control of the scholar;

(d) If the scholar fails to obtain a passing grade in the Social Work Licensure Examination within five (5) years from the time the scholar has graduated and completed the mandatory practical training hours; *Provided, That*, instead of repaying the full cost of the scholarship and related expenses, the scholar whose scholarship status has been terminated under Section 7 (b) or 7 (c) of this Act may opt to engage in work within the Social Work and development system, such as engaging in research work for the government or teaching Social Work-related subjects in a public educational institution, or being integrated into the Social Work and development system for a period prorated to the number of years of mandatory return service provided under this Act; *Provided, further*, That the alternative return service shall exclude the period of mandatory practical training hours;

(e) If it has been determined that the scholar has submitted falsified or fraudulent documents and/or requirements, or has employed fraud, in order to qualify for the SWPS program; and

(e) If, while being a scholar, the scholar commits gross misconduct in a manner that would bring significant damage to the SUC or PHEI concerned or the general public.

SECTION 8. Mandatory Return Service and Integration of the Scholar into the Public Social Welfare and Development System. - Upon passing the Social Work Licensure Examination administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and conferment by the PRC of the license to practice the social work profession, the scholar shall be integrated into the social welfare and development system, through the DSWD, and shall receive the appropriate civil service rank, salary and related benefits.

The scholar shall serve in a government office, government hospital, or any accredited government social welfare and development facility in the scholar's hometown or, in the

absence of a need thereat, in any municipality within the scholar's home province, or in any underserved municipality closest to the scholar's hometown determined by the DSWD as a priority area, for at least one (1) year for every scholarship year availed of: *Provided, That* scholars from municipalities with no licensed social workers shall render the return service work in the scholar's hometown: *Provided, further, That* the scholar who assumed the slot intended for a resident of another municipality, no resident of which qualified to be a scholar under this Act, shall render the return service work in the same municipality where the slot was originally intended: *Provided, finally, That* in all cases, the scholar shall only be required to serve in such municipality if no threat to the scholar's life is present thereat.

The scholar shall render the mandatory return service within six (6) years from the time of passing the Social Work Licensure Examinations: *Provided, however, That* the mandatory return service and integration into the public social welfare and development system under this Act shall be separate and distinct from the mandatory practical training required prior to taking the license examination for social workers: *Provided, further, That* the number of years served by the scholar in the public social welfare and development system as part of the return service requirements, if any, of the SUC or PHEI concerned, or social welfare research within the Philippines in a public institution or any international organization accredited by the DSWD for the underprivileged areas within the Philippines, or full-time teaching in a public institution shall be counted in the required number of years of return service under this Act: *Provided, finally, That* the licensed social worker shall receive appropriate salaries and other benefits for service rendered under the mandatory integration into the public social welfare and development system.

SECTION 9. Sanctions. - A social worker who has availed of the SWSP but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service and integration provided under this Act, as determined by the scholar's SUC or PHEI, in coordination with CHED and DSWD, shall be required to pay the full cost of scholarship, including other benefits and expenses incurred by reason of participation in the SWSP.

In case of nonpayment, as provided in the preceding paragraph, the PRC shall deny the renewal of the social worker's license: *Provided, That* the abovementioned penalties shall not apply to social workers who fail to comply with the required return service on account, or by reason of, severe or serious illness.

SECTION 10. Harmonization of All Nationally-Funded Scholarship Programs. - Upon the effectivity of this Act, all nationally-funded social work scholarship programs shall be harmonized, rationalized, and consolidated under the SWSP. The harmonization, rationalization and consolidation of scholarship programs under the SWSP shall be in coordination with the UniFAST Board created under Republic Act No. 10687 or the "United Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) Act".

SECTION 11. Training While Serving the Mandatory Return Service. - The CHED and DSWD shall develop programs for the continuous training of scholars while serving the mandatory return service under this Act.

SECTION 12. Social Work Schools and Plantilla Positions. - In order to have a holistic solution and address the scarcity of social workers in the country, the CHED, in coordination with the DSWD, shall ensure that each region shall have at least one (1) school offering social work programs. For this purpose, the CHED shall also streamline the requirements for the application for authority to offer social work degree programs. The CHED and DSWD shall issue the appropriate guidelines within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act.

In addition, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), DSWD and local government units (LGUs) where applicable, shall ensure that all scholars required to render return service under this Act shall be appointed to appropriate plantilla positions commensurate to their merit and fitness.

SECTION 13. Role of the CHED. - The CHED shall perform the following functions in the implementation of the SWSP:

- (a) Impose the accreditation of Social Work degree programs, especially in SUCs and PHEIs;
- (b) Encourage private HEIs to create/develop modules on Social Work courses;
- (c) Conduct regular information dissemination of and recruitment to the SWSP in SUCs and PHEIs, in coordination with the DSWD, to ensure that there will be an adequate number of social workers in all the municipalities and provinces;
- (d) Review, modify, and enhance the social work education curriculum standards to prepare graduates to work in community-based Social Work programs and to ensure that Social Work programs remain up-to-date and are of comparable quality to Social Work education in other countries;
- (e) Together with the DSWD, develop programs for the continuous training of scholars, based on identified competency gaps, while serving the mandatory return service under this Act;
- (f) Coordinate with the DSWD, SUCs, and PHEIs for the integration of the social work scholar into the public social welfare and development system;
- (g) Formulate, promulgate, disseminate and implement the necessary policies, standards, guidelines, and rules and regulations for the effective implementation of the SWSP under this Act;
- (h) Develop strategies and implement a system of quality control to improve the quality of the social work degree program offerings in SUCs and PHEIs;
- (h) Require SUCs and PHEIs to implement and submit a tracking, monitoring, evaluation and assistance system to determine the whereabouts of the social work scholars after graduation from SUCs or PHEIs;
- (i) Ensure the timely and adequate release to partner-SUCs and PHEIs of the funds necessary for the implementation of the SWSP, and monitor the timely and adequate release of the same by the partner-SUCs and PHEIs to the scholar-beneficiaries under the SWSP Program; and
- (j) Recommend, in coordination with partner-SUCs and PHEIs, to the DBM the amount necessary for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 14. Role of the SUCs and PHEIs. - The SUCs and PHEIs shall perform the following functions in the implementation of the SWSP:

- (a) Monitor the progress of all scholars in their respective educational institutions, identify those who have low or failing grades, and counsel them to improve their academic performance;
- (b) Coordinate with the CHED to ensure the timely release and accurate distribution of allowances and other fees to the scholars;

- (c) Make an annual report to the CHED on the performance of social work scholars and other necessary or vital information regarding the SWSP;
- (d) Assist the CHED in the conduct of regular information dissemination on, and recruitment to the SWSP;
- (e) Review, modify, and enhance the social work education curriculum, in coordination with the implementing agencies (national government agencies and non-governmental organizations, etc.), to prepare the scholars to work in community-based social work programs to ensure that Social Work education programs remain up to date with recent trends and developments;
- (f) Recommend strategies to CHED and DSWD to improve the implementation of the SWSP;
- (g) Conduct a tracer study on the whereabouts of their respective social work scholars after graduation from their institution and submit the results thereof to the CHED;
- (h) Recommend to CHED and DBM the budget necessary to implement the SWSP in their respective institutions based on their projected capacity and evaluation of the adequacy of the funding under this Program; and
- (i) Perform such other functions as may be deemed necessary for the success of the SWSP.

SECTION 15. Role of the DSWD. - The DSWD shall perform the following functions in the implementation of the SWSP:

- (a) In coordination with CHED, SUCs and PHEIs, determine the initial number and distribution of social workers needed for each barangay, municipality, city, or province, which determination shall be made every five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act;
- (b) Ensure the integration of scholars into the public social work and development service system, and monitor their performance during the mandatory return service period;
- (c) Coordinate with the LGUs for the mandatory integration of scholar-social workers into the public social welfare and development service system; and,
- (d) Recommend to DBM the creation of plantilla positions for scholar-social workers with salary grades commensurate to their educational achievement, training, and other qualifications, subject to increase of salary based on the salary standardization policies.

SECTION 16. Role of LGUs. - LGUs are mandated to support the integration of the social work scholars into the public social work and development system by performing the following functions:

- (a) Create a mechanism or system to provide the necessary support, including support to ensure their safety and protection, for the integration of social workers who will be assigned to the LGU;
- (b) Coordinate with the DSWD and the social workers to determine the specific needs or requirements of the community and provide the necessary assistance, including involvement in the research component of the public social work and development system;
- (c) As far as practicable and subject to availability of funds, maintain a regular counterpart fund

to be used for providing the balance of the scholarship budget for scholars enrolled in SUCs or PHEIs;

(d) Provide other forms of financial assistance, subject to availability of funds, to support the integration program of social workers in the LGUs;

(e) Recommend to the CHED any strategies to improve the implementation of the SWSP;

(f) In coordination with the CHED, SUC, or PHEI concerned, conduct an information dissemination campaign on the SWSP within the municipality, city or province, with the objective of attracting qualified applicants to the said Program;

(g) Execute and enforce laws, ordinances and regulations which may, directly or indirectly, have a positive impact on the SWSP; and

(h) Perform all other acts to assist the scholar to ensure that the scholar finishes the social work degree program within the timeframe provided by the SUC or PHEI or the CHED.

SECTION 17. Funding. The amount necessary to carry out the implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year's appropriation of the participating SUCs, PHEIs, DSWD, and CHED.

Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continuous implementation of the SWSP provided under this Act shall be included in the scholarship program of SUCs and CHED in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 18. Transitory Provisions. - Upon the effectivity of this Act, current scholars under the existing scholarship programs of DSWD and CHED shall automatically be eligible to avail the benefits under this Act.

SECTION 19. Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on SWSP. - There is hereby created a Joint Congressional Oversight Committee to oversee, monitor and evaluate the implementation of this Act.

The Oversight Committee shall be composed of five (5) members each from the Senate and from the House of Representatives, and shall include the following: Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Chairperson of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education; Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development; Chairperson of the House Committee on Social Services; and three (3) members each to be chosen from the membership of the Senate Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education, and the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education by the Senate President and the House Speaker, respectively: *Provided*, That at least one (1) member from the respective nominees of the House of Representatives and the Senate shall be chosen from the Minority.

SECTION 20. Determination of Number and Allocation of Scholars to be Admitted. - Every five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act, the DSWD and CHED shall, upon assessing the shortage of social human resource workforce in the country against the ideal standards and the upon consultation with participating SUCs and PHEIs, the DBM, and the PRC, determine the number and geographical allocation of scholars to be admitted every school year allocating at least one (1) scholarship slot in municipalities and cities that lack the ideal number of government licensed social workers: *Provided*, That in determining the allocation quota of the scholars to be admitted to the Program, utmost priority is given to regions with the low social

worker-to-population ratios: *Provided, finally*, That in order to ensure an adequate number of competent human resources for social work for the entire country, the DSWD shall submit to Congress the National Social Work and Development Human Resource Master Plan, and all updates thereto.

SECTION 21. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - Within one hundred twenty (120) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED and the DSWD shall, in coordination with the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations, PRC, DBM, SUCs, PHEIs, recognized associations of social work and other relevant stakeholders, formulate and issue the rules and regulations to fully implement the provisions of this Act: *Provided*, That the absence of the implementing rules and regulations shall not affect the effectivity of this Act and the grant of benefits provided therein.

SECTION 22. Separability Clause. - If any part or provision of this Act shall be held invalid or unconstitutional, the other parts or provisions hereof that are not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 23. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, or rules inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 24. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,