

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3031



Introduced by Representative Paolo Henry M. Marcoleta

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution itself requires legal assistance to be made accessible to all Filipinos, no matter their stature in life. This is in fact inscribed in the Bill of Rights, specifically Article III, Section 11 which states: “Free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.”

However, despite this enshrined principle, justice remains an elusive dream to many impoverished and marginalized Filipinos. This is in part due to the limited number of lawyers and legal services available to poor litigants.

This imbalance in accessibility is clearly shown in the workload handled by the Public Assistance Office (PAO). In 2024 alone, PAO’s workforce of 2,676 lawyers assisted more than 15 million clients and handled more than 847,000 cases.¹ This means that in a single year alone, each PAO lawyer on average assisted more than 5,600 clients and handled 317 cases.² This heavy workload, among other factors, has led to a high turn-over rate of public attorneys which in turn affects the effective legal representation of indigent Filipinos.

This bill aims to address this issue by institutionalizing a legal scholarship and return service program that would provide legal education scholarships to qualified students in exchange for a two-year return service in PAO or in other agencies that provide legal services to poor and unserved Filipinos. This proposed measure will not only assist students in achieving their dream of

¹ Public Attorney’s Office, Accomplishment Report of the Public Attorney’s Office for the Year 2024, 7, Available at <https://pao.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Accomplishment-Report-2024.pdf> (last accessed on July 05, 2025).

² Ibid.

becoming lawyers for the country, but will also help bridge the divide in our country's legal system in terms of accessibility and representation – proving that justice is not just an empty dream reserved for those with resources, but is an attainable reality available to all Filipinos.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized capital 'P' that loops around the first part of the name, followed by 'H M' and a period.

PAOLO HENRY M. MARCOLETA
Representative, SAGIP Party-List

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3031

Introduced by Representative Paolo Henry M. Marcoleta

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

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

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

3
4 **Sec. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – The State shall ensure that no person shall
5 be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any
6 person be denied the equal protection of the laws. The State shall also provide
7 free and adequate legal assistance to all citizens regardless of economic standing.
8 The State shall hereby establish a program to encourage more lawyers to serve
9 the people, and to guarantee that there shall be, at all times, a sufficient number
10 of lawyers to provide free and adequate legal services to indigent and
11 underprivileged Filipinos in need of legal assistance.

12
13 **Sec. 3. Establishment of the Legal Scholarship and Return Service**
14 *Program.* – A Legal Scholarship and Return Service (LSRS) Program shall be
15 established in state colleges and universities (SUCs) or in partner private higher
16 educational institutions (PHEIs) offering bachelor of laws or a Juris Doctor
17 degree, for qualified and deserving students: *Provided*, That priority in the
18 selection of recipients for the LSRS Program shall be given to:

- a. Members of the indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples (ICCs/IPs); or
- b. Those identified as poor or near poor based on the *listahanan* of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, or those whose income fall below the poverty threshold as defined by the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development, or those who cannot afford to provide in a sustained manner their minimum basic needs of food, health, education, housing, and other essential amenities of life.

Sec. 4. Coverage. – The LSRS Program established under this Act shall provide the following benefits to qualified students:

- a. Full tuition and other school fees, including but not limited to: student registration fees, library fees, and publication fees;
- b. Allowance for prescribed books and supplies;
- c. Allowance for transportation expenses and monthly living allowance;
- d. Allowance for review fees for government-mandated bar exams; and
- e. Allowance for licensure fees.

Sec. 5. 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 higher educational institution (HEI) offering legal education;
- c. Must be a graduating student or a graduate of an undergraduate degree program;
- d. Must be of good moral character; and
- e. 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 (PHEI) where the student intends to enroll.

Sec. 6. 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 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 PHEI 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 PHEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies of the SUC or PHEI 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; and
- e. Must render return service as provided under Section 8 of this Act.

Sec. 7. 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 expenses incurred during the participation in the LSRS program, in case of the following circumstances:

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

Sec. 8. Mandatory Return Service. – Within five (5) years from admission to the practice of law, a scholar shall render mandatory return service for two (2) years in the Public Attorney's Office (PAO), or in other government agencies and instrumentalities that provide legal services to poor and marginalized individuals, among others: Provided , That the mandatory return service shall be separate and distinct from the Clinical Legal Education Program as provided under Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court, as amended: Provided , further, That the beneficiaries of LSRS Program appointed to plantilla positions shall receive the appropriate

1 salaries, benefits and other emoluments for services rendered under the
2 mandatory return service; Provided , furthermore, That beneficiaries of LSRS
3 Program who, after three (3) years from admission to the practice of law, fails to
4 secure appointment in government shall have the option to: (i) pay the full cost
5 of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred
6 during the participation in the LSRS Program, or (ii) undertake alternative
7 compliance program to be formulated by the LEB pursuant to the provisions of
8 this Act and Republic Act No. 9999, otherwise known as the Free Legal
9 Assistance Act of 2010: Provided , finally, That in the application of Republic
10 Act No. 9999, the allowable deduction from the gross income shall be the amount
11 that could have been collected from the actual free legal services rendered or up
12 to ten percent (10%) of the gross income derived from the actual performance of
13 the legal profession, whichever is lower.

14
15 **Sec. 9. *Number and Allocation of Students to be Admitted in the Program.***
16 – Prior to the implementation of this Act and every five (5) years thereafter, the
17 LEB shall, in consultation with the Philippine Association of Law Schools and
18 participating HEIs and upon the assessment of the shortage of legal practitioners
19 in the public sector, determine the appropriate number and geographic allocation
20 of scholars to be admitted in the LSRS Program.

21
22 **Sec. 10. *Sanctions.*** – Any lawyer who has availed of the benefits under the
23 LSRS Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service
24 as provided under this Act shall be required to pay twice the amount of
25 scholarship, including other benefits received by reason of participation in the
26 LSRS Program: Provided , That the penalty imposed herein shall not apply to
27 lawyers who fail to comply with the required return service by reason of force
28 majeure or not due to their fault or negligence.

29
30 **Sec. 11. *Appropriations.*** – The amount necessary for the implementation
31 of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

32
33 **Sec. 12. *Annual Report.*** – Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this
34 Act, and every year thereafter, LEB shall submit an annual report on the
35 implementation of this Act to the Senate and the House of Representatives of the
36 Philippines.

1 **Sec. 13. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within sixty (60) days
2 from the effectivity of this Act, the LEB shall, in consultation with the Philippine
3 Association of Law Schools, Philippine Association of State Universities and
4 Colleges, the Commission on Higher Education, and other relevant government
5 agencies and stakeholders, promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively
6 implement the provisions of this Act.

7
8 **Sec. 14. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision or part of this Act is
9 declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder thereof not otherwise affected
10 shall remain in full force and effect.

11
12 **Sec. 15. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, presidential decrees, executive
13 orders, letters of instructions, proclamations or administrative regulations that are
14 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or
15 modified accordingly.

16
17 **Sec. 16. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following
18 its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

19
20 *Approved,*