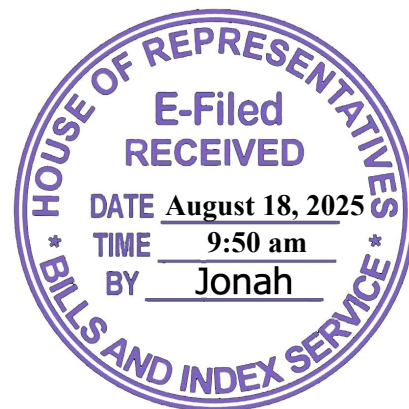


Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 3771



INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE PM VARGAS

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A HEALTH AND EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM
RELATED TO AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution mandates the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people and endeavor to make health services available to all people at affordable cost. Article 13, Section 11 of the 1987 Constitution provides that:

“The State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health and other social services available to all the people at affordable cost. There shall be priority for the needs of the under-privileged, sick, elderly, disabled, women, and children. The State shall endeavor to provide free medical care to paupers.”

Autism is a highly variable neurodevelopmental disorder that first appears during infancy or childhood, and generally follows a steady course without remission. Experts estimate that 3 to 6 children out of every 1,000 have autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In the Philippines, it is estimated that one out of every 500 Filipinos suffer from ASD or approximately 200,000 Filipinos out of a 100 million total population.

Autism is a developmental disability that has yet to be fully known and understood in the Philippines. The prevalence of autism in developing countries is rising rapidly, and health and education systems in these countries, like the Philippines, are particularly ill-equipped to deal with these issues. There currently exists a shortage of trained and highly-skilled

educators and health providers in the country to handle and cater to the needs of children and adults with autism. Many families are not even aware that their children have autism; hence, their children do not get the appropriate treatment and intervention.

This bill seeks to establish a health and education grant program related to autism spectrum disorders in order to promote awareness and alleviate the plight of thousands of families struggling with the costs for its detection and treatment. It is the hope of this measure that the country will take an active role in addressing autism and take that leap in supporting Filipinos with autism spectrum disorders.

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



REP. PM VARGAS

Fifth District, Quezon City

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

SECTION 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the “Autism Assistance Act”.

SECTION 2. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act, the term

- a) “Autism” refers to all conditions consistent with autism spectrum disorders or the condition of children whose behaviors were consistent with the DSM-IV-TR criteria for Autistic Disorder, Asperger Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS);
- b) “Secretary” refers to the Secretary of the Department of Health.

SECTION 3. Autism Assistance Program. –

- a) *Establishment and Purpose.* – The Secretary of Health shall establish and administer a health and education grant program to be known as the “Global Autism Assistance Program” to:
 - 1) support activities under subsection (c)(2) by nongovernmental organizations and other service providers, including advocacy groups, focused on autism in the provinces; and
 - 2) establish a “teach the teachers” program under subsection (d) to train health and education professionals working with children with autism in the provinces.
- b) *Designation of Eligible Provinces.* – Not later than 120 days after the date of the effectivity of this Act, the Secretary of Health, in consultation with knowledgeable autism organizations, shall

designate not fewer than two provinces in the country that are determined to:

- 1) require assistance in dealing with autism; and
- 2) have sufficient familiarity with issues related to autism to make effective use of the Global Autism Assistance Program.

c) *Selection of Implementing Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).* –

- 1) *In General.* – Not later than 180 days after the designation of eligible provinces pursuant to subsection (b), the Secretary of Health shall select and award a grant under this section to a nongovernmental organization with experience in autism-related issues to implement the Global Autism Assistance Program through selection and awarding of grants to local service providers and advocacy groups focused on autism.
- 2) *Activities.* – A local service provider or advocacy group that receives a grant under paragraph (1) may use such grant to carry out any of the following activities (including, as appropriate, the translation into local languages of relevant English-language publications):
 - i. *Education and Outreach to the Public.* – Use public service announcements and other public media to help the public become more aware of the signs of autism so that children with autism can be diagnosed and treated earlier.
 - ii. *Support to Families.* – Development of resources for families, such as online web resource centers in local languages, dissemination of materials to parents of newly diagnosed children, or other suitable alternatives, and dissemination of educational aids and guides to help parents with their children's development.
 - iii. *Support to Educational Institutions.* – Funding for schools or other educational institutions, focusing on teachers of the youngest students, and including the distribution of equipment or of the materials referred to in subparagraph (ii).
 - iv. *Support to Clinics and Medical Centers.* – Provision of funding to clinics and medical centers with proven records in addressing autism to assist with operating expenses, including personnel, equipment supplies, and facilities, development of assessment testing for autism, and acquisition of specialized equipment, such as augmentative communication devices.

d) *Support and Assistance from Implementing NGO.* – The implementing non-governmental organization shall provide, contract for, and coordinate technical assistance in support of its mission in meeting the goals and purposes of this Act.

e) *Teach the Teachers.* – The implementing non-governmental organization, acting on behalf of the Secretary of Health, in consultation with the Project Advisory Board, shall establish a program, to be known as the “Teach the Teachers Program”, to:

- 1) identify health and education professionals to receive specialized training for teaching and working with youth with autism, including training conducted in two- or three-day workshops at locations within one of the two provinces designated pursuant to subsection (b); and
- 2) conduct training through two- or three-day biomedical conferences in the two provinces designated pursuant to subsection (b), including bringing medical and psychological specialists to train and educate parents and health professionals who deal with autism, including training related to biomedical interventions that can affect autism, how nutrition and various metabolic issues can impact behavior, the role of applied behavioral analysis, and various occupational and speech therapies in fighting autism.

SECTION 4. *Application for Grants.* –

- a) *Submission of Applications.* – To be eligible to receive a grant from the implementing nongovernmental organization, a local service provider or advocacy group shall submit to such implementing nongovernmental organization an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as such implementing nongovernmental organization may require.
- b) *Establishment of Screening Board.* –
 - 1) *In General.* – The implementing nongovernmental organization responsible for implementing the Global Autism Assistance Program shall establish a screening board to be known as the “Project Advisory Board” to review for content and appropriateness applications from local service providers or advocacy groups submitted in accordance with subsection (a).
 - 2) *Membership.* – The members of the Project Advisory Board shall be appointed by the implementing nongovernmental organization, in consultation with the Secretary of Health, and in accordance with the following provisions:
 - i. Each member shall serve for a term of one year and each member may serve as many as three consecutive terms.
 - ii. A member of the Project Advisory Board may continue to serve after the expiration of the term of such member until such time as a successor is appointed.
 - iii. Membership of the Project Advisory Board shall include at least seven voting members who are members of autism advocacy groups, professionals working with autism, or otherwise associated with the autism community. Among the voting members of the Board shall be at least two parents from different families of individuals with autism, one medical professional working with autism, one teacher of individuals with autism, and one individual who has autism. Efforts shall be made to include on the Project Advisory Board individuals with experience working in the developing world.

- iv. Membership of the Project Advisory Board shall include non-voting members as determined appropriate by the Secretary of Health.
- v. Membership of the Project Advisory Board shall be chosen so as to ensure objectivity and balance and to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest.

SECTION 5. Appropriations. – To carry out the provisions of this Act, such sum as may be necessary is hereby authorized to be appropriated from the National Treasury. Thereafter, the sum necessary for the continuous operation of the program shall be included in the annual appropriation of the Department of Health.

SECTION 6. Separability Clause. – If, for any reason, any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, parts or provisions of this Act which are not affected shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SECTION 7. Repealing Clause. – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees, Implementing Rules and Regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 8. 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,