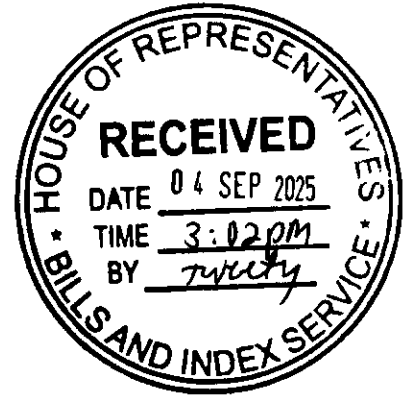




Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session



HOUSE BILL NO. 4353

Introduced by **Representative EDUARDO R. RAMA JR.**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines faces a silent crisis affecting its most vulnerable children. In a recent study by the United Nations Children's Fund, there is an estimated 1.6 million Filipino Children with learning disabilities (1). Moreover, of the more than one million learners with disabilities identified by the Department of Education (DepEd), only 391,089 are enrolled in public schools for SY 2024-2025, revealing a significant gap in reaching those who need support (2).

While the passage of Republic Act No. 11650, the Inclusive Education Act, was a landmark step in mandating the creation of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs), its full implementation remains a challenge. Many localities are still in the early stages of establishing these centers, leaving families without immediate relief.

For these families, raising a child with special needs is a journey of immense financial and emotional strain. Access to crucial services is often limited and expensive. A single session of occupational or speech therapy can cost between Php850.00 to Php3,000.00. For a child requiring multiple sessions per week, this can easily amount to Php5,000.00 to Php10,000.00 per month—a cost that is far beyond the reach of an average Filipino family. This is exacerbated by a shortage of specialists and inequitable distribution; the entire country has only 99 Developmental Paediatricians, with a majority (52%) practicing in the National Capital Region (3). Consequently, parents are forced to navigate an expensive and difficult landscape to find the care their children desperately need.

This bill, the "Inclusive Development and Well-Being of Children with Special Needs Act," seeks to bridge this gap by establishing an integrated national framework of support by addressing the challenges faced by these children and their families through a holistic approach that ensures no one is left behind.

The measure aims to provide tangible relief and create meaningful opportunities through several key interventions:

1. **Accessible Therapy and Education:** It mandates the expansion of SPED centers and strengthens inclusive education in mainstream schools. Crucially, it establishes subsidies, vouchers, and expanded PhilHealth coverage to make essential therapies and medical care affordable for all, especially for low-income families.
2. **Financial Relief for Families:** It provides direct financial support to families through grants and proposes tax incentives to alleviate the high cost of raising a child with special needs.
3. **Family and Societal Support:** It calls for the creation of community support centers and parental training and empowerment programs to empower caregivers. It also mandates national awareness campaigns to combat stigma and discrimination to foster a more inclusive and accepting society.
4. **Coordinated Implementation:** To ensure these efforts are effective and sustained, the bill creates an Inter-Agency Coordinating Council to harmonize the programs of the DSWD, DOH, DepEd, National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), PhilHealth and other relevant agencies, ensuring a unified government response.

Providing our children with special needs the right relief and opportunities is an investment in the future of our nation and a strong reflection of our values as Filipinos. This bill is a significant step towards upholding the dignity and rights of every child, giving them a genuine support and opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

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


REP. EDUARDO R. RAMA JR.
2nd District, City of Cebu



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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 4353

Introduced by **Representative EDUARDO R. RAMA JR.**

AN ACT
PROMOTING THE INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING OF
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, PROVIDING FOR COMPREHENSIVE
SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

2 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** - This Act shall be known as the "Inclusive Development and
3 Well-Being of Children with Special Needs Act."

4 **SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.*** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
5 protect and promote the rights of children with special needs, ensuring their full and inclusive
6 development. The State recognizes that children with special needs possess inherent dignity and
7 the right to a quality of life that enables them to achieve their fullest potential. To this end, the
8 State shall:

9 a) Prioritize and integrate the needs of children with special needs into all relevant
10 legislative efforts, policies, programs, and services.

11 b) Ensure access to quality, comprehensive, and appropriate intervention,
12 therapeutic, and educational services.

13 c) Alleviate the financial and emotional burdens on families of children with special
14 needs through various mechanisms.

15 d) Foster a society that embraces inclusivity, free from stigma and discrimination
16 against children with special needs and their families.

- 1 e) Strengthen inter-agency collaboration and establish a comprehensive support
2 system for children with special needs and their families.

3 **SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms. — As used in this Act:***

- 4 a) Children with Special Needs (CSN) refers to individuals below eighteen (18) years of
5 age who have developmental delays, disabilities, or conditions that require specialized
6 interventions, including but not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention-
7 Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, intellectual
8 disability, specific learning disabilities, sensory impairments (visual or hearing), and
9 speech and language disorders. This also include those who have long-tenn physical,
10 mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers
11 may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.
- 12 b) Early Intervention Services refers to a range of services provided to infants and
13 toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families to promote the
14 child's development and minimize the effects of the disability.
- 15 c) Therapeutic Services refers to professional interventions such as, but not limited to,
16 occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, behavioral
17 therapy, and other related services designed to improve the functional abilities and
18 well-being of CSN.
- 19 d) Special Education (SPED) refers to the educational program designed to meet the
20 unique needs of CSN, including SPED centers, inclusive classrooms, and home-based
21 programs.
- 22 e) Underserved Areas refers to geographical regions, localities, or communities where
23 access to specialized services for CSN is limited or nonexistent.
- 24 f) Assistive Tools and Medical Care refers to devices, equipment, technologies,
25 medications, and healthcare services that assist CSN in their daily living,
26 communication, mobility, and overall health management.

27 **SECTION 4. *Accessible Therapy and Education.*** — The State shall ensure that all
28 CSN have equitable access to quality therapy and education. To this end, the following shall be
29 implemented:

- 30 a) Expansion of SPED Schools and Centers. The Department of Education
31 (DepEd), in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and
32 Development (DSWD) and the Department of Health (DOH), shall establish and

1 expand SPED schools and centers in underserved areas, ensuring adequate
2 facilities and qualified SPED teachers and therapists.

3 b) Subsidies for Therapy Services. The DOH and DSWD, in coordination with the
4 Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), shall develop and
5 implement a subsidy program for therapeutic services for CSN, covering a
6 significant portion of therapy and rehabilitation costs. The subsidy program shall
7 prioritize indigent and low-income families.

8 c) Inclusion in Regular Schools. The DepEd shall strengthen its education program,
9 providing necessary and inclusive training for teachers, learning resources, and
10 education plans to facilitate the successful integration of CSN into mainstream
11 classrooms wherever appropriate.

12 **SECTION 5. *Financial Relief for Families.*** — To mitigate the financial burden on
13 families of CSN, the following measures shall be undertaken:

14 a) Vouchers and Grants. The DSWI), in coordination with relevant agencies, shall
15 establish a system of vouchers and grants for eligible families of CSN to support
16 the costs of therapy, medical care, assistive tools, and specialized education.
17 Priority shall be given to families categorized as indigent or vulnerable.

18 b) Tax Incentives. The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) shall explore and
19 recommend to Congress appropriate tax incentives for parents or legal guardians
20 of CSN, including deductions for medical expenses, therapy costs, and specialized
21 educational fees.

22 c) PhilHealth Coverage Expansion. PhilHealth shall expand its coverage to include a
23 range of therapeutic services, diagnostic procedures, and assistive devices for CSN,
24 with higher benefit limits and streamlined claims processes.

25 **SECTION 6. *Public Awareness and Acceptance Campaigns.*** — The State shall
26 promote public awareness and acceptance of CSN designed to foster an inclusive society and
27 combat stigma.

28 a) National Awareness Campaigns. The Department of Education (DepEd),
29 Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development
30 (DSWD), and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) shall develop and implement
31 national public awareness and acceptance campaigns on various special needs, which
32 shall promote understanding, empathy, and early identification.

- 1 b) Educational Curricula Integration. The DepEd shall integrate modules on special
2 needs awareness, inclusion, and disability rights into relevant educational curricula at
3 all levels.

4 **SECTION 7. *Support Systems for Families and Caregivers.*** — The State shall
5 establish and strengthen support systems for families and caregivers of CSN.

- 6 a) Community Centers for CSN. The DSWI, in coordination with the Local
7 Government Units (LGUs), shall endeavor to establish or support existing
8 community centers in their jurisdiction. The support may include any of the
9 following: i) free or subsidized therapy services, ii) parental training, and/or, iii)
10 emotional support groups for families of CSN. These centers shall also serve as
11 hubs for information dissemination and referral to other relevant services.
- 12 b) Parental Training and Empowerment Programs. The DSWD and DOH shall, in
13 coordination and cooperation with the Technical Education and Skills
14 Development Authority (TESDA), develop and implement comprehensive
15 training programs for parents and caregivers of CSN. These training programs shall
16 focus on equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to support their
17 child's development and manage challenging behaviors.

18 **SECTION 8. *Stronger Policies for Inclusion.*** — The State shall ensure the full
19 inclusion of CSN in all aspects of society.

- 20 a) Inclusion in Schools. The DepEd shall formulate and implement guidelines for
21 inclusive education, mandating reasonable accommodations, and nondiscriminatory
22 practices for CSN in both public and private schools.
- 23 b) Accessibility in Public Spaces. All government agencies and private establishments
24 shall ensure that public spaces, facilities, and services are accessible to CSN, in
25 compliance with existing accessibility laws and regulations.

26 **SECTION 9. *Inter-Agency Coordinating Council.*** — There is hereby created an
27 Inter-Agency Coordinating Council for Children with Special Needs (IACCSN) (hereinafter
28 referred to as the "Council"), to ensure the effective implementation of this Act. The Council shall
29 be composed of representatives from the DSWD, DOH, DepEd, National Council on Disability
30 Affairs (NCDA), PhilHealth, and at least two representatives from the private sector, which
31 directly implement programs relevant and related to the needs of the CSNs. The Council shall:

- a) Formulate and oversee the implementation of a comprehensive national plan for the welfare of CSN.
- b) Coordinate the programs and activities of various government agencies and non-government organizations pertaining to CSN.
- c) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs addressing the needs of CSN.
- d) Recommend legislative and policy reforms to further enhance the rights and well-being of CSN.

SECTION 10. *Appropriations.* — The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DSWD, in coordination with the DOH, DepEd, NCDA, PhilHealth, and in consultation with other relevant agencies and stakeholders, shall formulate and promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 12. *Separability Clause.* — If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SECTION 13. *Repealing Clause.* — All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 14. *Effectivity.* — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,