

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

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **4535**



Introduced by **Representative RAYMOND ADRIAN SALCEDA**

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution mandates the State to protect and promote the right of all children to proper care and development. It further declares that education shall be accessible to all and that vulnerable groups shall be provided with appropriate support systems.

Children with special needs represent one of the most underserved and vulnerable sectors in our society. They face unique developmental, educational, and health challenges that require continuous therapeutic interventions, specialized education, and supportive environments. Without proper public support, families of children with special needs often shoulder the burden of high therapy costs, limited access to appropriate schools, and the social stigma that isolates both the children and their caregivers.

This bill seeks to establish a comprehensive national framework that will address these systemic gaps by:

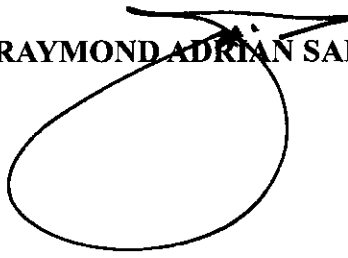
1. **Making therapy and education accessible** – through the expansion of Special Education (SPED) schools and centers, subsidies for therapy, and inclusion programs in regular schools, particularly in underserved areas.
2. **Providing financial relief for families** – by creating vouchers and grants, offering targeted tax deductions, and expanding PhilHealth coverage for therapeutic services and assistive devices.
3. **Strengthening public awareness and inclusion** – through national campaigns and the integration of inclusivity and disability rights in curricula, to combat stigma and foster acceptance.

4. **Supporting families and caregivers** – by establishing community centers, parent training, and empowerment programs that will allow families to become active partners in their children’s development.
5. **Creating an inter-agency coordinating mechanism** – to harmonize the efforts of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Education, Department of Health, PhilHealth, and the National Council on Disability Affairs, alongside civil society and the private sector.

The approach of this measure is systems-based. It not only provides direct services to children with special needs, but also integrates them into mainstream education and social participation, while lightening the economic burden on their families. It recognizes that inclusivity is not a matter of isolated interventions but of sustained and coordinated support across the entire life cycle of a child.

By enacting this measure, Congress will affirm the principle that every Filipino child—regardless of disability or developmental condition—has the right to live with dignity, to learn, to grow, and to be a fully included member of society.

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


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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 “Inclusive Development and Well-Being of Children with Special Needs Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights of children with special needs, ensuring their full and inclusive development. The State recognizes that children with special needs possess inherent dignity and the right to a quality of life that enables them to achieve their fullest potential.

To this end, the State shall:

- a) Prioritize and integrate the needs of children with special needs into all relevant legislative efforts, policies, programs, and services;
- b) Ensure access to quality, comprehensive, and appropriate intervention, therapeutic, and educational services;
- c) Alleviate the financial and emotional burdens on families of children with special needs through various mechanisms;
- d) Foster a society that embraces inclusivity, free from stigma and discrimination against children with special needs and their families; and
- e) Strengthen inter-agency collaboration and establish a comprehensive support system for children with special needs and their families.

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

a) Children with Special Needs (CSN) refers to individuals below eighteen (18) years of age who have developmental delays, disabilities, or conditions that require specialized interventions, including but not limited to Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, intellectual disability, specific learning disabilities, sensory impairments (visual or hearing), and speech and language disorders.

b) Early Intervention Services refers to a range of services provided to infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families to promote development and minimize the effects of disability.

c) Therapeutic Services refers to professional interventions such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, behavioral therapy, and other related services.

d) Special Education (SPED) refers to educational programs designed to meet the unique needs of CSN, including SPED centers, inclusive classrooms, and home-based programs.

e) Underserved Areas refers to geographical regions where access to specialized services is limited or non-existent.

f) Assistive Tools and Medical Care refers to devices, equipment, technologies, medications, and healthcare services that assist CSN in their daily living, communication, mobility, and overall health management.

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

a) Expansion of SPED Schools and Centers. – The Department of Education (DepEd), in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Health (DOH), shall establish and expand SPED schools and centers in underserved areas, ensuring adequate facilities and qualified SPED teachers and therapists.

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

c) Inclusion in Regular Schools. – The DepEd shall strengthen its inclusion program, providing training for teachers and learning resources to integrate CSN into mainstream classrooms wherever appropriate.

SEC. 5. *Financial Relief for Families.* To mitigate financial burdens on families of CSN, the following measures shall be undertaken:

a) Vouchers and Grants. – The DSWD shall establish vouchers and grants to support costs of therapy, assistive tools, and specialized education, prioritizing indigent families.

b) Tax Incentives. – The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) shall recommend tax incentives for parents or guardians of CSN, including deductions for therapy, medical care, and specialized educational fees.

c) PhilHealth Coverage Expansion. – PhilHealth shall expand coverage to include therapeutic services, diagnostic procedures, and assistive devices for CSN, with higher benefit limits and streamlined claims.

SEC. 6. *Public Awareness and Acceptance Campaigns.* The State shall promote public awareness and acceptance of CSN to combat stigma through:

a) National Awareness Campaigns. – Led by DepEd, DOH, DSWD, and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), focusing on early identification, empathy, and inclusion.

b) Educational Curriculum Integration. – The DepEd shall integrate modules on inclusivity and disability rights in curricula.

SEC. 7. *Support Systems for Families and Caregivers.* The State shall establish support systems for families and caregivers of CSN, including:

a) Community Centers for CSN. – The DSWD and Local Government Units (LGUs) shall establish or support community centers offering subsidized therapy, parent training, and emotional support groups.

b) Parental Training and Empowerment Programs. – The DSWD and DOH, in cooperation with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), shall develop training for parents to equip them with skills to support child development.

SEC. 8. *Stronger Policies for Inclusion.* The State shall ensure full inclusion of CSN in all aspects of society by:

a) Inclusion in Schools. – The DepEd shall mandate inclusive education guidelines and anti-discrimination practices.

b) Accessibility in Public Spaces. – All government and private establishments must comply with accessibility laws.

SEC. 9. *Inter-Agency Coordinating Council.* There is hereby created an Inter-Agency Coordinating Council for Children with Special Needs (IACCSN), composed of representatives from the DSWD, DOH, DepEd, National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), PhilHealth, and two (2) private sector representatives. The Council shall:

a) Formulate and oversee a comprehensive national plan for CSN welfare;

b) Coordinate programs of government and non-government organizations;

c) Evaluate program effectiveness and recommend improvements; and

d) Recommend legislative and policy reforms.

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

SEC. 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, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 12. *Separability Clause.* If any part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions shall remain valid.

SEC. 13. *Repealing Clause.* All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 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,