

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City

20th Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL No. 4801



Introduced by HON. MAURICIO G. DOMOGAN

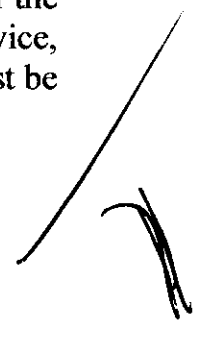
EXPLANATORY NOTE

The national budget is more than a ledger of figures; it is the lifeblood of governance and the concrete expression of our collective priorities as a people. Every peso appropriated reflects a choice made on behalf of the Filipino, and every item in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) must therefore withstand the test of legality, transparency, and fairness.

At the heart of this process stands the Bicameral Conference Committee. Conceived as a mechanism to reconcile differences, if any, between the House of Representatives and that of the Senate, its role is indispensable in ensuring that the national budget is both workable and responsive. Yet, as the Supreme Court has time and again reminded us — in *Tolentino v. Secretary of Finance*, and other landmark cases — the committee's powers are not boundless. It may harmonize, reconcile, or adjust; but it may not legislate anew. Insertions of provisions or appropriations absent from either chamber's version are, in truth, an evasion of the constitutional mandate that every law must pass three readings in each House.

This bill seeks to enshrine in statute what our jurisprudence has long declared: that fidelity to the Constitution is non-negotiable, and that the power of the purse belongs not to a few but to the whole Congress acting in the manner prescribed by our fundamental law. By prohibiting unauthorized insertions, by mandating transparency through publication of bicameral reports, and by imposing accountability for violations, we reaffirm the principle that public funds are sacred and must be guarded with utmost integrity.

This measure is not merely an exercise in technical discipline. It is a call to leadership — that in stewarding the nation's resources, we act as trustees of the people, guided not by expedience but by the higher demands of honesty, service, and the rule of law. In passing this measure, we declare that governance must be

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open, decisions must be accountable, and the national budget must truly be the people's budget.



MALRICIO G. DOMOGAN

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HOUSE BILL No. **4801**

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**AN ACT DEFINING AND REGULATING THE POWERS OF THE
BICAMERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON THE GENERAL
APPROPRIATIONS ACT AND PROVIDING TRANSPARENCY
MEASURES**

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 “*Budget Bicameral Transparency and Accountability Act.*”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* It is the policy of the State to ensure transparency, accountability, and constitutionality in the enactment of the General Appropriations Act. Towards this end, the bicameral conference committee has the strict duty to solely reconcile differences between the versions of the budget of the two houses of Congress and shall not exercise legislative power beyond such scope.

SECTION 2-A. *Definition of Terms.* For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

1. Bicameral Conference Committee – A joint committee composed of members from both Houses of Congress tasked with reconciling differences in the respective versions of a bill passed by each chamber.
2. General Appropriations Act (GAA) – The annual national budget law that authorizes the release and use of public funds for government operations, programs, and projects.

3. Insertions – Appropriations, provisions, or items introduced during the bicameral conference committee proceedings that were not present in either the House or Senate version of the bill.

4. Comparative Matrix – A tabular presentation showing the differences and reconciliations among the House version, Senate version, and the final bicameral version of the General Appropriations Act.

5. Ratification – The formal approval by both chambers of Congress of the bicameral conference committee report.

6. Transparency Measures – Mechanisms designed to ensure public access to information regarding the proceedings and outputs of the bicameral conference committee.

7. Disciplinary Action – Sanctions imposed by either chamber of Congress on its members for violations of internal rules or laws, including those outlined in this Act.

SECTION 3. *Powers of the Bicameral Conference Committee.* The bicameral conference committee on the General Appropriations Act shall have the following powers and functions:

- (a) Reconcile and harmonize conflicting provisions of the House and Senate versions;
- (b) Adjust figures or allocations when such differences exist; and,
- (c) Adopt either the House or Senate version of a provision, or a compromise thereof.

SECTION 4. *Prohibited Acts.* The bicameral conference committee is not allowed to do the following acts:

- (a) Insert or introduce new appropriations, provisions, or items not contained in either the House or Senate version of the GAA;
- (b) Alter the nature, purpose, or beneficiary of an appropriation in a manner inconsistent with either version; and,
- (c) Include matters unrelated to the GAA.

SECTION 5. *Transparency Measures.* The bicameral conference committee report shall include a comparative matrix of the House version, Senate version, and the bicameral version. The report shall be published in the official websites of the House of Representatives and the Senate at least three (3) days before ratification by both chambers.

SECTION 6. *Accountability.* Any member of the bicameral conference committee who knowingly introduces or causes the introduction of prohibited insertions under Section 4 shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action by their respective chamber, without prejudice to administrative or criminal liability under existing laws.

SECTION 7. *Judicial Review.* Nothing in this Act shall limit the power of the Supreme Court to exercise judicial review over unconstitutional provisions of the General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 8. *Separability Clause.* If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 9. *Repealing Clause.* All laws, orders, issuances, rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 10. *Effectivity.* This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.