



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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5098



Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE CHEENO MIGUEL D. ALMARIO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In 2024, the United Nations stated on its State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report that fifty-one (51) million Filipinos experience moderate or severe food insecurity. This shows that the Philippines ranks the lowest among all other Southeast Asian nations. Food insecurity is a situation where all people, at all times, have no physical, social, nor economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their daily dietary needs and food preferences.¹

Lack of safe and nutritious food, of course, has dire effect on the most vulnerable sectors of the population, particularly the growing children. Being unable to meet their nutrition requirement causes growth gap to the children's physical and mental development. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, the Philippines is among the countries with the worst growth stunting issues in the entire world. Almost 3 out of 10 children under five years old are experiencing growth stunting.² This condition of food insecurity also has an ill effect to our economy. Our country is reportedly losing four hundred ninety-six billion pesos (PhP496,000,000,000) annually. This loss is reflected on the reduced workforce productivity and higher healthcare expenses relative to malnutrition.³

The Philippines, being a member of the International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is under the obligation to ensure every Filipino's right to be free from hunger, and shall take, individually and through international cooperation,

¹ <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/243718/un-51m-filipinos-food-insecure>.

² <https://opinion.inquirer.net/173292/misunderstanding-malnutrition-in-ph>.

³ <https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/30/2417987/price-malnutrition-philippines-loses-p496-billion-each-year>.

measures to improve methods of production, conservation and food distribution. Also, Executive Order No. 292 or the "Administrative Code of 1987" mandates the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to formulate, develop, and implement plans, programs, and projects on social welfare and development aimed to providing assistance to the most vulnerable members of society.

Under the WALANG GUTOM (Zero Hunger) 2027 Food Stamp Program of the Government, the DSWD launched the Philippine Food Strategic Transfer and Alternative Measures Program (STAMP). This is further enhanced by the Reducing Food Insecurity and Undernutrition with Electronic Vouchers (REFUEL) Program which seeks to expand the original target of 750,000 food insecure-families from 2025 to 2028.

This bill seeks to create a system that will institutionalize the REFUEL Program of the government with the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system. This program shall seek to help those citizens who fall below the poverty line, with emphasis on families with pregnant or lactating women, children under five years old, senior citizens, and/or persons with disabilities.

Hence, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


HON. CHEENO MIGUEL D. ALMARIO
Representative, 2nd District of Davao Oriental



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AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING THE REDUCING FOOD INSECURITY AND
UNDERNUTRITION WITH ELECTRONIC VOUCHERS (REFUEL) PROGRAM
AS A FOOD STAMP INITIATIVE TO COMBAT INVOLUNTARY HUNGER,
PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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 “REFUEL Food Security Act of 2025.”

SECTION 2. State Policy. – The State shall endeavor to free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, raise the standard of living, and improve the quality of life for all.

The State shall seek to create and implement policies which shall eradicate food insecurity throughout the country.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

- a. *Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)* – A system that allows the transfer of food credits through reloadable cards to be used at accredited partner-merchants.

- b. *Food Poverty Line* – The minimum monthly income required by a family to meet basic food requirements, computed and regularly updated by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and serving as a basis for benefit levels and eligibility.
- c. *Eligible Beneficiaries* – Households whose income falls below the food poverty line, with prioritization for families with pregnant or lactating women, children under five, senior citizens, or persons with disabilities.
- d. *Listahan ng mga Pamilyang Nangangailangan (Listahanan)* – Also known as the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR), an information management system of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) that identifies who and where the poor are in the Philippines for purposes of establishing a basis for targeting beneficiaries of social protection programs. Inclusion in the Listahanan is determined through nationwide household assessments conducted in cycles, the results of which are periodically updated to reflect changes in household conditions.
- e. *REFUEL Food Security Program* – A national food stamp program aimed at addressing involuntary hunger by providing eligible beneficiaries with electronic food credits for the purchase of nutritious food items.

SECTION 4. Establishment of the REFUEL Food Security Program. – There is hereby established a REFUEL Food Security Program (herein after referred to as the Program) under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which shall implement and oversee the food stamp initiative nationwide.

SECTION 5. Program Components. – The Program shall include the following components:

- a. Identification of Beneficiaries;
- b. Distribution of Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards preloaded with monthly food credits equivalent to at least Three Thousand Pesos (Php 3,000) per household;
- c. Accreditation of Partner-Merchants such as grocery stores, wet markets, and cooperatives that will accept food stamps as payment;
- d. Nutrition Education and Counseling to ensure proper food choices and prevent malnutrition;
- e. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation to assess program impact and make evidence-based improvements;
- f. Limitation of food credit use to eligible food items, as defined by the DSWD in consultation with the Department of Health (DOH), which shall not be converted to cash nor used to purchase non-food items; and

- g. Establishment of alternative benefit delivery mechanisms in geographically isolated or disadvantaged areas, with support from LGUs and accredited community-based organizations, ensuring offline accessibility and inclusivity.

SECTION 6. Beneficiary Identification. – For purposes of determining eligibility under this Act, the DSWD shall utilize the most recent official results of the Listahanan household assessment cycle and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) poverty data. The DSWD shall ensure that beneficiary identification is based on updated and validated data to reflect current household conditions. In the event that a new cycle is ongoing or pending validation, the DSWD may provisionally use the latest available official results, subject to immediate updating upon completion of the subsequent cycle.

SECTION 7. Phased Implementation. – The Program shall be implemented in phases, beginning with the bottom seven hundred and fifty thousand (750,000) households nationwide based on the most recent Listahanan and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) poverty data. Priority shall be given to households with pregnant or lactating women, children under five (5) years old, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens. Expansion to additional households shall be subject to evaluation and availability of funds. Local Government Units (LGUs) shall assist in program dissemination, field validation, grievance handling, and beneficiary profiling, in coordination with the DSWD.

SECTION 8. Local Government Counterpart and Participation. – Local Government Units (LGUs) shall be encouraged to provide a counterpart fund for the implementation of the Program within their jurisdictions. The national government may provide matching grants or incentives to LGUs that commit resources or implement complementary hunger mitigation programs with adjustments for household composition and nutritional vulnerability, including higher allocations for families with pregnant or lactating women, based on Department of Health (DOH) nutritional standards.

SECTION 9. Integration with Existing Social Protection Programs. – The DSWD shall ensure that the Program complements and integrates with other national programs such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), the Department of Education's school-based feeding programs, and the Department of Agriculture's food distribution initiatives to ensure coherence, avoid duplication, and maximize impact.

SECTION 10. Lead Implementing Agency. – The DSWD shall be the primary implementing agency and may coordinate with the following:

- a. Department of Health;
- b. Department of Agriculture;

- c. Department of the Interior and Local Government;
- d. National Nutrition Council;
- e. Local Government Units; and
- f. Non-Government Organizations.

SECTION 11. Funding. – The amount necessary to implement the program shall be charged against the annual appropriations of the DSWD. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SECTION 12. Private Sector Engagement and Alternative Financing. - The DSWD is authorized to enter into partnerships with private sector entities for the co-financing, support, or implementation of the Program. Contributions by private partners may be recognized as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and may be eligible for tax incentives under existing laws.

Partner merchants shall offer eligible food items that meet the nutritional standards set by the Department of Health (DOH) and National Nutrition Council (NNC).

SECTION 13. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Independent Assessment. - An independent evaluation of the program's effectiveness, efficiency, and impact shall be conducted annually in partnership with recognized institutions such as the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), academic organizations, or civil society networks. Results shall guide subsequent phases and improvements of the program.

SECTION 14. Penal Clause. – Any person who commits fraud or misrepresentation to receive or misuse program benefits shall be penalized in accordance with relevant laws, including but not limited to the Revised Penal Code, the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, and RA 10175 or the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012.

SECTION 15. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DSWD, in consultation with stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 16. Separability Clause. - If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder shall not be affected and shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SECTION 17. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SECTION 19. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,