

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5242



Introduced by **HON. BRIAN RAYMUND S. YAMSUAN**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM
FOR DESERVING STUDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution mandates that “[f]ree access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.”¹ This constitutional right underscores the responsibility of the State to ensure that economic barriers do not prevent citizens from meaningful access to legal counsel.

In 2022, the Public Attorney’s Office (PAO) handled 850,753 cases and 900,079 clients² with only about 2,427 public attorneys nationwide.³ In recognition of the shortage of public attorneys relative to the number of courts across the country, 178 new public attorney positions were created in 2024. Additionally, in 2025, the Supreme Court approved “The Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service” (ULAS Rules), which mandates covered lawyers to render at least 60 hours of pro bono legal aid every three years in favor of indigent Filipinos.⁴

¹ 1987 Constitution, Article III, Section 11.

² Enhanced legal representation for indigent Filipinos. Available at <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php/management-2/2873-enhanced-legal-representation-for-indigent-filipinos-pangandaman-approves-creation-of-178-new-public-attorney-positions>; 178 new PAO lawyers to help deliver justice for indigents. Available at <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1229449?>.

³ Mangaluz, Jean. (2024). DBM approves 178 new public attorney posts. Philstar. Available at <https://qa.philstar.com/nation/2024/07/19/2371128/dbm-approves-178-new-public-attorney-posts>.

⁴ SC Approves The Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service. Available at <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/sc-approves-the-rules-on-unified-legal-aid-service/>.

However, issues on the workload of public attorneys continue to persist. In 2024, PAO reported that with 2,676 public attorneys, there is a ratio of 5,631 clients per one public attorney and a ratio of 317 cases per one public attorney.⁵ This heavy workload not only hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of PAO in the delivery of legal services, it also results in a high turn-over rate of public attorneys.⁶

To address these gaps, we are introducing this measure that would sponsor deserving students pursuing legal education, who in return, will be required to render legal services in government institutions such as the PAO, Department of Justice, and local government legal offices after graduation. The return service program aims to future-proof the country's legal sector by ensuring a steady pool of competent and committed lawyers who can serve marginalized communities.

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



BRIAN RAYMUND S. YAMSUAN
Representative
2nd District of Parañaque

⁵ Accomplishment Report of the Public Attorney's Office for the Year 2024. Available at <https://pao.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Accomplishment-Report-2024.pdf>.

⁶ *Id.*

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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 “Abogado Para sa Bayan Act”.

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is hereby declared the policy of the State to ensure free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance for all Filipinos, especially the underprivileged. Towards this end, the State shall establish a legal scholarship and return service program to assist deserving students pursue legal education who shall eventually render legal services in government offices.

SECTION 3. Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program. — There shall be established a Legal Scholarship and Return Service (LSRS) Program for deserving students who intend to pursue a Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where there are no SUCs offering Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree. The LSRS Program shall provide the following benefits to qualified legal education students:

- (a) Free tuition and other school fees, including but not limited to, student registration fees, library fees, and publication fees;
- (b) Allowance for prescribed books and supplies;
- (c) Allowance for review fees for the government-mandated bar exam; and

- (d) Allowance for licensure fees.

SECTION 4. Qualifications and Requirements. – In order to be qualify for the grant of scholarship under the LSRS Program, a prospective or current legal education student must satisfy the following requirements:

- (a) Must be a Filipino Citizen residing in the Philippines;
- (b) Must not have completed a Bachelor of Laws or Juris Doctor degree from any HEI offering legal education;
- (c) Must be a graduating student or a graduate of an undergraduate degree program; and
- (d) Must have passed the entrance examination and complied with other requirements for admission into the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree program offered by the SUC or private HEI where the student intends to enroll.

SECTION 5. Conditions for the Grant of Legal Scholarship. – Qualified students accepted into the LSRS Program shall be subject to the following conditions:

- (a) Must sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of the scholarship which shall be prescribed by the Legal Education Board (LEB);
- (b) Must carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC or private HEI concerned, and shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which would result in underloading;
- (c) Must finish the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree program within the prescribed timeframe of the SUC or private HEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies of the SUC or private HEI concerned: Provided, That a scholar who is already enrolled, may be allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, to file a leave of absence;
- (d) Must take the bar examination within a maximum period of one (1) year after completion of the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree;
- (e) Must render return service as provided under Section 7 of this Act.

SECTION 6. Disqualifications. – The scholarship grant shall terminate, and the recipient of legal scholarship shall repay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the LSRS program, in case of the following circumstances:

- (a) If the scholar fails to meet the academic requirements or to complete the course within the prescribed period without valid cause as may be determined by the SUC or private HEI concerned;
- (b) If the scholar commits gross misconduct in a manner that would bring significant damage to the SUC or private HEI concerned or to the community as a whole.

SECTION 7. Mandatory Return Service. – Within five (5) years from admission to the practice of law, a scholar shall render mandatory return service for two (2) years in government agencies, including, but not limited to: the Public Attorney's Office, National Prosecution Service, Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, Department of Justice, Department of National Defense, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Judiciary, or in government agencies and instrumentalities that provide legal services to: (i) poor and marginalized individuals and communities, and (ii) public school teachers, public health workers, and military and uniformed personnel involved in cases arising from or in connection with the performance of their duties and functions: Provided, That the mandatory return service shall be separate and distinct from the Clinical Legal Education Program as provided under Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court: Provided, further, That beneficiaries of the LSRS Program appointed to plantilla positions shall receive the appropriate salaries, benefits and other emoluments for services rendered under the mandatory return service; Provided, furthermore, That beneficiaries of LSRS Program who, after three (3) years from admission to the practice of law, fails to secure appointment in government shall have the option to: (i) pay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the LSRS Program; or (ii) undertake alternative compliance program to be formulated by the LEB pursuant to the provisions of this Act and Republic Act No. 9999, otherwise known as the Free Legal Assistance Act of 2010: Provided, finally, That in the application of Republic Act No. 9999, the allowable deduction from the gross income shall be the amount that could have been collected from the actual free legal services rendered or up to twenty percent (20%) of the gross income derived from the actual performance of the legal profession, whichever is lower.

SECTION 8. Number and Allocation of Students to be Admitted in the Program. – Prior to the implementation of this Act and every five (5) years thereafter, the LEB shall, in consultation with Philippine Association of Law Schools and participating HEIs, and upon the assessment of the shortage of legal practitioners in the public sector, determine the appropriate number and geographic allocation of scholars to be admitted in the LSRS Program.

SECTION 9. Sanctions. – Any lawyer who has availed of the benefits under the LSRS Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service as provided under this Act shall be required to pay twice the amount of scholarship, including other benefits received by reason of participation in the LSRS Program: Provided, That the penalty imposed herein shall not apply to lawyers who fail to comply with the required return service by reason of force majeure or not due to their fault or negligence.

SECTION 10. Appropriations. – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Legal Education Board shall, in consultation with the Philippine Association of Law Schools, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and Commission on Higher Education, promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 12. Separability Clause. - Should any provision of this Act be declared unconstitutional, the remaining parts not affected thereby shall remain valid and operational.

SECTION 13. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, orders, circulars, issuances, rules and regulations and parts thereof which are inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SECTION 14. Effectivity. — This act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

Approved,