

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

20th CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5488



Introduced by **REP. JUAN CARLOS "ARJO" C. ATAYDE**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR POOR AND ACADEMICALLY
QUALIFIED STUDENTS OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
AND PRIVATE TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AMENDING
FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10931, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS
THE "UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION ACT"

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Students across the tertiary spectrum already face significant financial, environmental, and mental challenges in pursuing higher education.¹ The current data on Philippine tertiary education further underscores the critical role of the private sector as the dominant provider of access. As of Academic Year (AY) 2024–2025, there are 2,334 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nationwide, of which 1,619 are privately owned and operated—representing about 69.36% of all tertiary education providers in the country.²

One of the key reasons low-income students turn to private institutions is the persistent geographic imbalance in the distribution of quality tertiary education. Historically, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) have been concentrated in urban centers, leaving students in remote or rural areas with limited access to affordable,

¹ Aban, Jomar & Sevilleja, Aisha & Asiro, Jenilyn & Ebueza, Rachelle & Calica, Ederlinda & Navasca, Mayeth. (2025). Students' Financial, Environmental, Mental, and Physical Challenges and Their Predictors: A Public Higher Education Case in the Philippines. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*. 20. 193-223. 10.18848/2327-011X/CGPV20i02/193-223.

² Statistics | Commission on Higher Education - CHED, <https://ched.gov.ph/statistics/>

high-quality education.³ This rural–urban divide continues to fuel inequality across the country.⁴ For students in far-flung municipalities, the absence of nearby public HEIs often leaves them with two difficult options: to bear the steep financial and opportunity costs of relocating to a distant city to attend a competitive SUC, or to enroll in the nearest private HEI, which may offer fewer resources and lower-quality programs.

This bill seeks to address these disparities by amending Republic Act No. 10931, or the “*Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*,” to establish a Voucher System that grants portable financial assistance to poor and academically qualified students enrolled in private HEIs and Technical-Vocational Institutions (TVIs). The vouchers will subsidize the full cost of tuition and miscellaneous fees through a proportional budgetary allocation administered by the UniFAST Board. To ensure fairness and efficiency, the measure also defines key terms such as “*Poor and Academically Qualified Student*,” “*Proof of Income*,” and “*Proportional Budgetary Allocation*.” Students who are TES grantees will not be eligible for the Voucher System to avoid duplication of benefits.

In this bill, the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) will include Filipino students enrolled in private HEIs in cities or municipalities where an SUC or LUC exists but does not offer comparable or equivalent degree programs, and TES beneficiaries will continue to receive such subsidy until they complete their degree or course. Meanwhile, the proposed *Voucher System* will subsidize the tuition and miscellaneous fees of poor and academically qualified students to allow them to study or transfer to private HEIs or TVIs.

The proposed amendments further refine the provisions such as the TES coverage is clarified to include allowances for books, school supplies, transportation, room and board, and the acquisition of a computer when necessary. By introducing a

³ <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/pids-paper-calls-for-balanced-access-quality-in-higher-education>

⁴ Zamora, Christian Marvin & Dorado, Rowena. (2015). Rural-Urban Education Inequality in the Philippines Using Decomposition Analysis. *Journal of Economics, Management, and Agricultural Development*. 1. 63-71.

targeted Voucher System alongside an enhanced TES, this measure ensures that public resources are used more effectively to bridge equity gaps and improve academic mobility. It empowers poor but high-performing students to pursue their desired programs in institutions best suited to their talents and aspirations, thereby promoting genuine access, choice, and quality in higher education.

Furthermore, the resulting competition and collaboration between public and private institutions are expected to uplift the overall standards of Philippine tertiary education.

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



REP. JUAN CARLOS "ARJO" C. ATAYDE

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

3 "Section 3. Definition of Terms. - As used in this Act:

4 XXX

5 I) POOR AND ACADEMICALLY QUALIFIED STUDENT REFERS TO A
6 STUDENT WHO BELONGS TO A HOUSEHOLD RANKED AS "POOR" BY
7 THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT BASED
8 ON PROOF OF INCOME AS PRESENTED TO THE UNIFAST BOARD, AND
9 WHO CONSISTENTLY MEETS THE ACADEMIC RETENTION
10 REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONCERNED HEI OR TVI FOR A REGULAR
11 UNIT LOAD;

12 XXX

1 (L) PROOF OF INCOME REFERS TO ANY DOCUMENTATION USED TO
2 VERIFY, AUTHENTICATE, OR ASSESS THE ANNUAL INCOME OF A
3 PERSON OR HOUSEHOLD;

4 (M) PROPORTIONAL BUDGETARY ALLOCATION REFERS TO A
5 BUDGETARY ALLOCATION WHICH SHALL SUBSIDIZE THE FULL COST
6 OF TUITION AND MISCELLANEOUS FEES IN THE FORM OF PORTABLE
7 VOUCHERS FOR POOR AND ACADEMICALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS;

8 xxx

9 (Y) VOUCHER SYSTEM REFERS TO A SYSTEM THAT GRANTS PORTABLE
10 VOUCHERS TO POOR AND ACADEMICALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS
11 PRIOR TO THE START OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR TO ALLOW THEM TO
12 STUDY OR TRANSFER TO PRIVATE HEIs OR PRIVATE TVIs IN CITIES
13 AND MUNICIPALITIES WHERE THERE ARE EXISTING SUCs, LUCs, AND
14 PUBLIC TVIs."

15
16 **Section 2.** Section 3 (i) and (j) are amended to be denominated as Section 3 (j)
17 and (k) respectively. Section 3 (k) to (u) are amended to be denominated as Section 3
18 (n) to (x).

19 **Section 3.** Section 7 of Republic Act No. 10931 is hereby amended to read as
20 follows:

21 "SEC. 7. *TERTIARY EDUCATION SUBSIDY (TES) for Filipino Students.* – To
22 support the cost of tertiary education or any part or portion thereof, a TES is
23 hereby established IN ALL SUCs, LUCs, PRIVATE HEIs AND TVIs for all
24 Filipino students who [shall] enroll in THE FIRST undergraduate-post-
25 secondary TERTIARY EDUCATION program[s] [of SUCs, LUCs, private HEIs
26 and all TVIs] OF THEIR CHOICE. The TES shall be administered by the
27 UniFAST Board and the amount necessary to fund the TES shall be included
28 in the RESPECTIVE budgets of the CHED and the TESDA: Provided, That
29 prioritization shall be given to students in the following order: (a) students

1 who are part of households included in the UPDATED *Listahanan* [2.0] 3,
2 LAUNCHED ON AUGUST 1, 2022 BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
3 WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT, ranked according to the estimated per
4 capita household income; and (b) students not part of the *Listahanan* [2.0] 3,
5 ranked according to estimated per capita household income based on
6 [submitted documentation of] THE proof of income to be determined by the
7 UniFAST Board: Provided[,] further, That such prioritization shall not apply to
8 Filipino students in cities and municipalities with no existing SUC or LUC
9 campus AND PUBLIC TVI: PROVIDED FINALLY, THAT FILIPINO
10 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS IN PRIVATE
11 HEIs IN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES WHERE AN SUC OR LUC EXISTS,
12 BUT DOES NOT OFFER COMPARABLE OR EQUIVALENT DEGREE
13 PROGRAMS, SHALL BE ELIGIBLE FOR TES.

14 TO SUPPORT THE COST OF TERTIARY EDUCATION OR ANY PART
15 OR PORTION THEREOF, [T]he TES may, among others, [and to support the
16 cost of tertiary education or any part or portion thereof,] cover the following:

17 (a) Tuition and other school fees in private HEIs, and private [or LGU
18 operated] TVIs, which shall be equivalent to the tuition and other school
19 fees of the nearest SUC or state-run TVI in their respective areas;

20 (b)[An] [a]AllowanceS for books, SCHOOL supplies, transportation TO
21 AND FROM SCHOOL, and [miscellaneous personal expenses
22 including a] reasonable allowance for the documented rental or
23 purchase of a [personal computer or laptop] DESKTOP OR PORTABLE
24 COMPUTER, WHEN APPLICABLE [and other education-related
25 expenses];

26 (c) An allowance for room and board costs TO BE incurred by the
27 student, WHEN APPLICABLE;

28 (d) xxx

29 (e) xxx

1 ALL TES BENEFICIARIES SHALL CONTINUE TO RECEIVE
2 SUCH BENEFITS OR SUBSIDY UNTIL THEY COMPLETE THEIR
3 POST-SECONDARY TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL COURSE OR
4 HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE PROGRAM: PROVIDED, THAT
5 THEY COMPLY WITH RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS IN
6 ACCORDANCE WITH THE RULES OF THE HEIs AND TVIs."

7 **Section 4.** A new Section denominated as Section 7A is hereby inserted after
8 Section 7 of Republic Act No. 10931 to read as follows:

9 SEC. 7A. VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR POOR AND ACADEMICALLY
10 QUALIFIED STUDENTS OF PRIVATE HEIs AND TVIs. - THERE SHALL BE
11 A PROPORTIONAL BUDGETARY ALLOCATION TO SUPPORT POOR
12 AND ACADEMICALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS THROUGH A PORTABLE
13 VOUCHER SYSTEM TO BE ADMINISTERED BY THE UNIFAST BOARD
14 THAT SHALL ALLOW BENEFICIARIES TO STUDY IN PRIVATE HEIs AND
15 PRIVATE TVIs IN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES WHERE THERE ARE
16 EXISTING SUCs, LUCs, AND PUBLIC TVIs.

17 THE ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENTS UNDER THE VOUCHER SYSTEM
18 SHALL BE DETERMINED BY THE UNIFAST BOARD, BASED ON
19 REASONABLE ECONOMIC AND ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS, NOT
20 LATER THAN THE START OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR AS DETERMINED
21 BY THE CHED, AND, IN THE CASE OF TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL
22 STUDENTS, NOT LATER THAN THE PERIOD DESIGNATED BY THE
23 TESDA, AND PRIOR TO THE START OF THE SPECIFIC TRAINING
24 PROGRAM OR COURSE.

25 STUDENTS OF PRIVATE HEIs AND PRIVATE TVIs WHO ARE TES
26 GRANTEES CAN NO LONGER QUALIFY FOR THE VOUCHER SYSTEM.
27 ALL VOUCHERS ISSUED UNDER THIS ACT SHALL BE USED
28 EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING POOR AND
29 ACADEMICALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS WHO OPT TO STUDY IN
30 PRIVATE HEIs AND PRIVATE TVIs IN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES
31 WHERE THERE ARE EXISTING SUCs, LUCs AND PUBLIC TVIs."

1 FOR THIS PURPOSE, AND WITHIN SIXTY (60) DAYS FROM THE
2 EFFECTIVITY OF THIS ACT, THE UNIFAST BOARD SHALL COMMISSION
3 A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE APPROPRIATE COST OF TUITION AND
4 MISCELLANEOUS FEES FOR PRIVATE HEIs AND TVIs IN THE COUNTRY,
5 WHICH SHALL BE THE NOMINAL VALUE OF THE VOUCHER UNDER
6 THE SYSTEM. THE AMOUNT OF TUITION AND MISCELLANEOUS FEES
7 SHALL BE REVIEWED EVERY THREE (3) YEARS TO ALLOW FOR
8 ADJUSTMENTS DUE TO INFLATION."

9 **Section 5.** Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED
10 shall issue the rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement the provisions
11 of this Act.

12 **Section 6.** Republic Act No. 10931, otherwise known as the "Universal Access
13 to Quality Tertiary Education Act", is hereby amended. All laws, presidential decrees,
14 executive orders, rules and regulations, and issuances or parts thereof which are
15 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are repealed, amended or modified
16 accordingly.

17 **Section 7.** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the
18 Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

19 Approved,