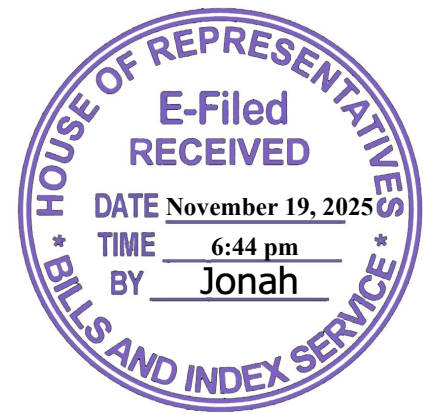


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City
TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session



HOUSE BILL NO. 6230

Introduced by **REP. BERNADETTE "DETTE" G. ESCUDERO**

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill of Rights directs the State to uphold the right of every citizen to free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and ensure that adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty. However, the primary barrier to this right is a critical and persistent shortage of government lawyers. The Public Attorney's Office (PAO), the state's principal legal aid provider, has officially recognized this gap. In its 2024 Accomplishment Report, the PAO confirmed that its lawyers are "still overworked" and face a "heavy burden of handling cases," which has led to an "exodus of public attorneys."¹ The report further noted that as new courts are created, the required counterpart plantilla items for public attorneys are not automatically funded, exacerbating the shortage. The government itself has acknowledged this manpower crisis. In July 2024, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) approved the creation of 178 new Public Attorney positions to "address the shortage relative to the existing courts". Similarly, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the hiring of 98 new prosecutors in April 2024 to "ease the heavy workload of the National Prosecution Service."² While these new positions are welcome, they are a stop-gap measure for a systemic problem. A sustainable, long-term strategy is required to build a robust and dedicated corps of lawyers in the public sector

This bill, the *Abogado para sa Bayan Act*, seeks to establish a long-term solution that will create our Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program in the country. This legal scholarship and return service mechanism will provide comprehensive financial support to qualified and deserving students for their legal education and in exchange, these scholars will be required to render mandatory return service in the PAO, the

¹ Public Attorney's Office. (2025, February). *Executive Summary of Accomplishments 2024*. Retrieved last 8 November 2025 from: <https://pao.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Executive-Summary-of-Accomplishments-2024.pdf>

² Philippine News Agency. (15 April 2025). *DOJ: 98 new prosecutors to help expedite cases resolution*. Retrieved last 10 November 2025 from: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1222631>

National Prosecution Service, or other government offices providing legal assistance to the poor and marginalized. It will also enhance the quality of public legal services by ensuring that indigent clients receive focused and effective representation from lawyers who are not handling an unmanageable number of cases. It democratizes legal education by removing the financial barriers that prevent bright but underprivileged students from entering the legal profession. It promotes a public service culture, answering the call such as those made by Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo which is to foster a "deep sense of social responsibility" and produce professionals who will "advocate for those in need."

By investing in our nation's future lawyers, we are investing in the backbone of our justice system, therefore, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



HON. BERNADETTE "DETTE" G. ESCUDERO

Representative
1st District, Sorsogon

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

1 **Section 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “Abogado Para sa
2 Bayan Act”.

3 **Sec. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
4 uphold the right to free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and ensure that
5 adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.
6 Towards this end, and in cognizance of the constitutional directive to provide for
7 preventive measures and legal aid services to the underprivileged whose human rights
8 have been violated or need protection, the State shall establish a legal scholarship and
9 return service program to assist deserving students pursue legal education and
10 strengthen the pool of public sector lawyers and ensure that they shall eventually render
11 legal services in government offices and communities most in need of legal aid.

12 **Sec. 3. Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program.** – There shall be
13 established a Legal Scholarship and Return Service (LSRS) Program for deserving
14 students who intend to pursue a Juris Doctor degree in state universities and colleges
15 (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where there
16 are no SUC offering Juris Doctor degree. The LSRS Program shall provide the following
17 benefits to qualified legal education students:

- 18 (a) Free tuition and other school fees, including but not limited
19 to: student registration fees, library fees, and publication fees;
20 (b) Monthly sustenance allowance;
21 (c) Allowance for prescribed books, supplies and online
22 materials;
23 (d) Allowance for review fees for government-mandated bar
24 exams; and
25 (e) Allowance for licensure fees.

Sec. 4. Qualifications and Requirements. – In order to be qualified 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 Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws 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 degree program offered by the SUC or private HEI where the student intends to enroll.

Sec. 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 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 degree program within the prescribed time frame 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 degree;
- (e) Must render return service as provided under Section 7 of this Act.

Sec. 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 LEB, SUC or private HEI concerned or to the community as a whole.

Sec. 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

1 and Development, the Courts, or in government agencies and instrumentalities that
2 provide legal services to: (i) poor and marginalized individuals and communities, and
3 (ii) public school teachers, public health workers, and military and uniformed personnel
4 involved in cases arising from or in connection with the performance of their duties and
5 functions: *Provided*, That the mandatory return service shall be separate and distinct
6 from the Clinical Legal Education Program as provided under Rule 138-A of the Rules of
7 Court: *Provided, further*, That beneficiaries of LSRS Program appointed to *plantilla*
8 positions shall receive the appropriate salaries, benefits and other emoluments for
9 services rendered under the mandatory return service; *Provided, furthermore*, That
10 beneficiaries of LSRS Program who, after three (3) years from admission to the practice
11 of law, fails to secure appointment in government shall have the option to: (i) pay the
12 full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred
13 during the participation in the LSRS Program; or (ii) undertake alternative compliance
14 program to be formulated by the LEB pursuant to the provisions of this Act and Republic
15 Act (RA) No. 9999, otherwise known as the Free Legal Assistance Act of 2010: *Provided*,
16 *finally*, That in the application of Republic Act No. 9999, the allowable deduction from
17 the gross income shall be the amount that could have been collected from the actual
18 free legal services rendered or up to twenty percent (20%) of the gross income derived
19 from the actual performance of the legal profession, whichever is lower.

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

26 **Sec. 9. Harmonization with the Clinical Legal Education Program.** –
27 Pursuant to Section 5 (5), Article VIII of the Constitution, the Legal Education Board
28 shall adopt the policy on the Revised Law Student Practice Rule, ensure that law
29 students participate in the clinical legal education programs in all legal education
30 institutions, define the scope of service to be rendered by law students in the said
31 program, contribute to access to justice of the marginalized sectors, enhance learning
32 opportunities of law students, instill among them social responsibility and awareness,
33 and prepare them for the practice of law.

34 **Sec. 10. Sanctions.** – Any lawyer who has availed of the benefits under the
35 LSRS Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service as
36 provided under this Act shall be required to pay twice the amount of scholarship,
37 including other benefits received by reason of participation in the LSRS Program:
38 *Provided*, That the penalty imposed herein shall not apply to lawyers who fail to comply
39 with the required return service by reason of *force majeure* or not due to their fault or
40 negligence.

41 **Sec. 11. Appropriations.** – The amount necessary for the implementation of
42 this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

43 **Sec. 12. Separability Clause.** – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid
44 or unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected thereby shall
45 remain in full force and effect.

1 **Sec. 13. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders,
2 rules and regulations, or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this
3 Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

4 **Sec. 14. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect immediately following its
5 publication in the *Official Gazette* or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

1 *Approved,*