



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **6279**



Introduced by **Representative MA. VICTORIA CO-PILAR**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The right to vote is the cornerstone of every democracy. Yet, for many Filipinos, the exercise of such right remains fraught with barriers. Senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), pregnant women, indigenous peoples (IPs), persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), health workers, often encounter physical, logistical, or occupational challenges that hinder their full participation in the electoral process.

This proposed measure, titled “AN ACT PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE MODES OF VOTING FOR HIGHLY VULNERABLE SECTORS TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE,” seeks to address these long-standing concerns by ensuring that members of these highly vulnerable sectors are given alternative and accessible modes of voting, tearing down the logistical and physical walls that stand between them and the ballot box and allowing them to exercise their constitutional right of suffrage freely, safely, and with dignity.

At the heart of the bill lies the introduction of Early Voting privileges for in both national and local elections. Through such an option, this measure directly responds to common difficulties such as long queues, limited mobility, health-related constraints, and work or confinement

schedules that prevent these groups from a timely participation on election day.

To ensure effective implementation, the bill mandates the **Commission on Elections (COMELEC)** to conduct a special nationwide registration and record-keeping system for these groups, developed in coordination with relevant agencies like the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) and the Department of Health (DOH), to facilitate this early privilege.

Furthermore, the Act significantly **amends Republic Act No. 10366** to expand the definition of an **Accessible Polling Place (APP)**. Beyond mere ground-level access, comprehensive infrastructure will be introduced. This includes essential accessibility features such as ramps, **Braille candidate lists, sign language interpreters, and transport wheelchairs**, ensuring a genuinely barrier-free voting experience. To overcome logistical barriers, the COMELEC is likewise obligated to provide **transportation/shuttle services** for senior citizens, PWDs, pregnant women, and IPs to and from the polling places—an acknowledgment that accessibility begins long before a voter reaches the polling places.

The measure institutionalizes this focus by authorizing the establishment of a dedicated **Vulnerable Sectors Office (VSO)** within the COMELEC, dedicated to overseeing and advancing inclusive electoral practices. The office's initial funding shall be drawn from the Commission's current appropriations, reflecting a prudent yet proactive commitment to **democratic inclusion** in the Philippines.

Through this measure, we strengthen the foundation of participatory governance by affirming that every Filipino, regardless of age, condition, or circumstance, deserves an equal opportunity in shaping the nation's future. We uphold not only the letter of the Constitution but also its spirit: that democracy must be universal, inclusive, and compassionate.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Garcia', located in the bottom right corner of the page.



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AN ACT
PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE MODES OF VOTING FOR HIGHLY VULNERABLE SECTORS TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT OF SUFFRAGE, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10366, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

SECTION 1. *Declaration of Policy.* The State shall ensure that senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), pregnant women, indigenous peoples (IPs), persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), and health workers are able to exercise their right to political participation without restrictions. The State shall devise systems and procedures that will enhance accessibility in their voting process.

SEC. 2. *Early Voting.* In consideration of their respective physical and health conditions, senior citizens and persons with disabilities, pregnant women, indigenous peoples (IPs), persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), and health workers shall be allowed to vote early in national and local elections.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the term:

- (a) “Commission” refers to the Commission on Elections.
- (b) “Senior citizens” refer to qualified voters who are sixty (60) years or older.

(c) "Persons with disabilities" or "PWDs" refer to qualified voters who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

(d) "Pregnant women" refer to qualified voters who are pregnant during election day regardless of the number of trimesters. For purposes of early voting, the term shall refer to qualified voters who are pregnant at the time of registration to avail of early voting and who, in the natural course of events, are expected to remain pregnant during the period of early voting.

(e) "Indigenous peoples" refer to qualified voters who belong to a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. IPs shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains.

(g) "Person Deprived of Liberty" refers to a detainee, inmate, or prisoner, or other person under confinement or custody in any other manner.

(h) "Health Workers" shall mean all persons who are engaged in health and health-related work, and all persons employed in all hospitals, sanitariums, health infirmaries, health centers, rural health units, barangay health stations, clinics, and other health-related establishments owned and operated by the government or its political subdivisions with original charters and shall include medical, allied health professional, administrative and support personnel employed regardless of their employment status who physically report to the frontlines during the day of the election.

SEC. 4. Section 2 (j) of Republic Act No. 10366 is hereby amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 2. Definition of Terms. – xxx

(a) xxx.

xxx.

(j) Accessible polling place refers to the venue where the [~~Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs)~~] **ELECTORAL BOARD** conducts election-related proceedings and where the voters cast their votes. The accessible polling place shall be located at the ground floor, preferably near the entrance of the building, [~~and is~~] **SHALL BE READILY ACCESSIBLE TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, SHALL BE** free of any physical barriers, and provided with [~~necessary services, including assistive devices~~] **THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE INCLUDING ASSISTIVE DEVICES, TRANSPORT WHEELCHAIRS, RAMPS, RAILINGS, SIDEWALKS, ADEQUATE LIGHTING, VENTILATION, SUFFICIENT SIGNAGE AND DIRECTIONAL SIGNS, LISTS OF CANDIDATES TRANSCRIBED IN BRAILLE, AND OTHER FEATURES FOR PWDs, PREGNANT WOMEN, AND SENIOR CITIZENS, AS WELL AS SUPPORT SERVICES OF EXPERTS IN ASSISTING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SUCH AS SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS. ACCESSIBLE POLLING PLACES SHALL BE LOCATED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TOWN HALLS OR PLAZAS, CIVIC CENTERS, COMMUNITY CENTERS, OR OTHER SIMILARLY DESIGNATED VENUES. IN DESIGNATING THE ACCESSIBLE POLLING PLACES, THE COMMISSION SHALL GIVE PREFERENCE TO VENUES DESIGNED WITH SPECIAL FEATURES TO ENSURE THE SAFETY AND COMFORT OF SENIOR CITIZENS, PREGNANT WOMEN, AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.**

SEC. 5. *Registration.* There shall be a nationwide registration for senior citizens, person with disabilities, pregnant women, indigenous peoples, persons deprived of liberties, and health workers to qualify them to avail of this early voting privilege. Those who are not registered under this Act shall vote on Election Day.

SEC. 6. *Obligations of the Commission on Elections.* To ensure the effective implementation of this Act, the Commission on Elections shall:

(a) Keep a record of senior citizens, person with disabilities, pregnant women, indigenous peoples, persons deprived of liberties, and health workers who are registered voters;

(b) Design a registration system, in coordination with local government units, the National Council on Disability Affairs, National Commission on Indigenous

Peoples, the Commission on Human Rights, the Department of Health, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology for senior citizens, person with disabilities, person with disabilities, pregnant women, indigenous peoples, and health workers in order to facilitate their early voting;

(c) Ensure that polling places are safe and accessible to senior citizens and PWDs, and properly fitted with the necessary communication, visual and physical aids, as mandated under Republic Act No. 10366 entitled, “An Act Authorizing the Commission on Elections to Establish Precincts Assigned to Accessible Polling Places Exclusively for Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens”; and

(d) Mount an intensive information campaign on early voting for qualified senior citizens, PWDs, lawyers, and human resources for health.

SEC 7. *Establishment of the Vulnerable Sectors Office.* The Commission is hereby authorized to establish a VSO tasked specifically to oversee and supervise the effective implementation of the Accessibility Voting Bill: Provided, that its secretariat shall come from the existing secretariat personnel of the Commission on Elections.

SEC. 8. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the Commission shall, in consultation with other relevant government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations, promulgate the rules and regulations necessary to implement this Act.

SEC. 9. *Appropriations.* The initial appropriation to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the Commission. Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. *Separability Clause.* Should any provision of this Act or part hereof be declared unconstitutional, the other provisions or parts not affected thereby shall remain valid and effective.

SEC. 11. *Repealing Clause.* All laws, decrees, orders, and issuances, or portions thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 12. *Effectivity.* This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,