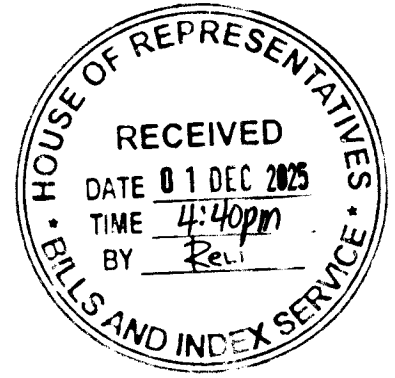


Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Metro Manila

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS**  
*First Regular Session*

**6520**  
HOUSE BILL NO. \_\_\_\_\_



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**Introduced by Representative JB BERNOS  
And Representative CHING BERNOS**

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**AN ACT FACILITATING WOMEN'S RE-ENTRY INTO THE WORKFORCE AFTER  
CHILDBIRTH OR CARE-RELATED CAREER BREAKS, INSTITUTIONALIZING  
RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAMS, STRENGTHENING ANTI-DISCRIMINATION  
PROTECTIONS RELATING TO CAREER GAPS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

Article II, Section 14 of the 1987 Constitution recognizes the role of women in nation-building and guarantees the fundamental equality of women and men before the law. Despite the enactment of progressive laws such as the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) and the Expanded Maternity Leave Law (Republic Act No. 11210), a significant policy gap persists in addressing the challenges faced by women seeking to return to work after childbirth or caregiving responsibilities.

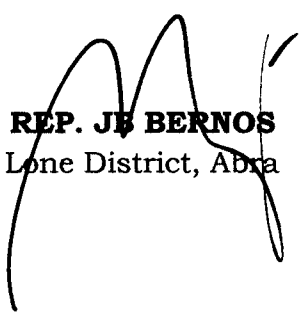
Many women professionals who temporarily leave employment to care for children or family members encounter systemic barriers upon re-entry. Employers often view career gaps as signs of diminished competence or commitment, leading to prolonged unemployment, loss of income, and underutilization of skilled human capital. Such biases not only affect women's economic opportunities but also deprive industries of experienced professionals.

At present, there is no national framework specifically designed to assist women in rebuilding their careers after childbirth. While some private companies offer flexible arrangements or limited re-skilling programs, these are exceptions rather than the norm. By contrast, several countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and Singapore, have established structured "returnship" programs, which are paid re-entry placements with mentorship and upskilling components, to help returning professionals regain confidence and rebuild their careers. These programs have been shown to improve retention rates and promote gender diversity in leadership and technical fields.

This measure, to be known as the Women's Returnship Act, seeks to establish a national framework that promotes equitable re-employment for women returning from caregiving breaks. It mandates the creation of returnship programs, providing re-skilling and mentorship support, introduces hiring incentives for participating employers, and strengthens anti-discrimination standards against career-gap bias.

By easing the re-entry of women into the workforce, this bill upholds the constitutional commitment to gender equality and recognizes that empowering women to rejoin productive work enhances household income, boosts national productivity, and contributes to inclusive economic growth.

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



**REP. JB BERNOS**  
Lone District, Abra



**REP. CHING B. BERNOS**  
SOLID NORTH Party-List

Republic of the Philippines  
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PROTECTIONS RELATING TO CAREER GAPS, 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 “Women Back-to-Work Act.”

**SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It hereby declared the policy of the State to promote gender equality and to ensure that women are not disadvantaged in employment by reason of childbirth, caregiving, or family responsibilities. The State shall establish mechanisms that enable women to return to productive employment with dignity, free from discrimination, and equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a changing labor market. Supporting women's re-entry into the workforce shall be a national strategy to advance inclusive growth, strengthen families, and maximize human resource potential.

**SEC. 3. Definition of Terms.** – For the purpose of this Act, the following terms are defined:

- (a) Returning Women Professional - refers to a woman who left the formal workforce due to childbirth, caregiving, or similar family-related reasons, and seeks to resume paid employment;
- (b) Returnship - refers to a structured, time-bound re-entry program that provides paid work experience, training, and mentorship to returning professionals; and

- (c) Participating Employer - refers to any public or private entity that provides returnship opportunities or adopts fair re-entry practices under this Act.

**SEC. 4. National Return-to-Work Framework.** – The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Civil Service Commission (CSC), and the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), shall establish a National Return-to-Work Framework for Women, which shall:

- (a) Promote equitable hiring practices for women with employment gaps;
- (b) Support re-skilling and mentorship programs;
- (c) Encourage public and private institutions to open re-entry pathways for women returning to professional work; and
- (d) Include awareness campaigns to discourage bias against employment gaps; and

**SEC. 5. Returnship Program.** – A Returnship Program shall be institutionalized under DOLE to provide structured re-entry opportunities for returning women professionals. Participating employers may offer six-month to one-year returnships that combine paid employment with mentorship and re-skilling.

DOLE shall accredit participating employers and assist in designing returnship modules aligned with industry standards. Participants who complete such programs shall receive certification recognizing their updated qualifications and readiness for re-employment.

**SEC. 6. Incentives for Participating Employers.** – Employers that implement accredited returnship programs or hire returning women professionals shall be eligible for incentives such as tax deductions for training expenses, wage subsidies for returnees, and public recognition as “Return-Friendly Employers.”

These incentives shall be administered in coordination with the Department of Finance (DOF) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), subject to guidelines issued by DOLE.

**SEC. 7. Career Gap-Neutral Hiring Policy.** – All government agencies, government-owned and -controlled corporations, and private companies with over one hundred (100) employees shall be encouraged to adopt Career Gap-Neutral Hiring Policies, ensuring that employment applications and interviews focus on competence and skills rather than penalizing gaps caused by caregiving or maternity leave.

The Civil Service Commission shall issue corresponding guidelines for the public sector, while DOLE and DTI shall develop model templates and best practices for the private sector.

**SEC. 8. Re-Skilling and Career Transition Support.** – The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), in partnership with DOLE and other

accredited training institutions, shall design re-skilling, digital literacy, and professional certification programs for returning women professionals. These shall be linked with Public Employment Service Offices (PESOs) and industry associations to ensure job placement upon completion.

**SEC. 9. Workplace Flexibility and Support.** – Employers participating under this Act shall promote flexible work arrangements, including remote work or adjustable schedules, when feasible. Lactation stations and breastfeeding breaks, as required under Republic Act No. 10028, shall be integrated into re-entry work arrangements.

**SEC. 10. Appropriations.** – A Returnship and Re-Entry Support Fund is hereby established under DOLE to finance re-skilling programs, employer incentives, and public information campaigns. The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of DOLE. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

**SEC. 14. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Secretary of Labor and Employment, in consultation with DTI, CSC, PCW, and other concerned agencies, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations necessary to operationalize this Act.

**SEC. 15. Separability Clause.** – If any portions or provisions of this Act are declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining portions or provisions not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

**SEC. 16. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, memoranda, circulars, and other issuances, or parts thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

**SEC. 17. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,