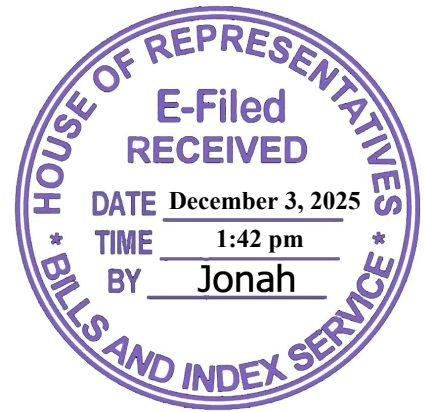


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 6577



Introduced by Representative LEILA M. DE LIMA

AN ACT
INSTITUTING A NATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR THE
PREVENTION, EARLY DETECTION, DIAGNOSIS, AND TREATMENT OF
PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurological and developmental condition that affects how an individual perceives, communicates, and interacts with others. It encompasses a range of characteristics, including challenges in social skills, speech, and behavior, as well as unique strengths and capabilities¹. While awareness of autism has grown globally, many Filipinos on the spectrum continue to face stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to vital services such as early diagnosis, therapy, education, and employment opportunities.

According to the Autism Society of the Philippines, the country has a prevalence of 1 in every 100 individuals. This translates to approximately 1.2 million Filipinos living with autism². Despite this significant number, there remains a considerable gap in national policies, public awareness, and institutional support systems that promote the full inclusion and protection of Persons with Autism (PWAs). The absence of a comprehensive national framework has hindered the early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of autism, leading to missed opportunities for intervention and support.

This proposed measure seeks to establish a National Comprehensive Program for the prevention, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of autism in the Philippines. It recognizes the right of every person with autism to full, healthy, and

¹ Gutierrez, G. (17 January 2024). Advancing acceptance and inclusion: The Filipino nation's drive to support persons with autism. Retrieved from: <https://mirror.pia.gov.ph/features/2024/01/17/advancing-acceptance-and-inclusion-the-filipino-nations-drive-to-support-persons-with-autism>

² Capitol Medical Center (21 January 2025). National Autism Consciousness Week. Retrieved from: <https://capitolmedical.com.ph/event-sannouncement/national-autism-consciousness-week/>

holistic development, ensuring that they are empowered to become independent, self-reliant, and productive members of society.

This measure institutionalizes the creation of an Autism Council of the Philippines under the Department of Health (DOH). This inter-agency and multi-sectoral body will coordinate and implement national policies, promote public awareness, strengthen family support networks, and ensure the delivery of inclusive programs and services for children and adults with autism. The Council will also spearhead research initiatives, education and training programs, and anti-discrimination efforts across education, employment, public transportation, insurance coverage, and emergency response systems.

Furthermore, the bill provides mandatory PhilHealth coverage for all PWAs, ensuring access to necessary medical, rehabilitative, and therapeutic care. It also mandates continuing education and sensitivity training for public service providers and health personnel to equip them with the knowledge and compassion necessary to effectively address the needs of PWAs. Provisions against discrimination, as well as measures ensuring privacy, informed consent, and equal opportunities, underscore the bill's rights-based approach to autism care.

Through this Act, the State affirms its duty to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of PWAs. It envisions a nation where neurodiversity is embraced, where autism is not met with stigma but with compassion, and where every Filipino, regardless of neurological difference, can live with dignity, equality, and hope.

This bill draws inspiration from Senate Bill No. 1433, filed by this Representation in the 17th Congress. In addition to the Senate measure, key provisions have also been adopted from related proposals introduced in the 20th Congress by Representatives Jaime R. Fresnedi, Ferdinand L. Hernandez, and Lordan G. Suan. These include the definition of intervention, the structure and composition of the Autism Council of the Philippines, the mandate for continuing education and training for service providers, and the protective measures against discrimination in education, employment, public transportation, and insurance coverage. Safeguards for Persons with Autism (PWAs) during disasters, emergencies, and legal proceedings have likewise been integrated. Together, these adopted measures strengthen the bill's comprehensive and rights-based policy framework for PWAs.

Approval of this measure is earnestly sought.



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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 “Autism Care Act of
2 2025”.

3
4 SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
5 protect and promote the right to health of the people, including the rights of Persons
6 with Autism (PWAs) to full, healthy and holistic development. As such, the State shall
7 promote an environment conducive to the development of autistic persons to become,
8 to the best of their potential, independent, self-reliant and productive members of
9 society.

10
11 Towards this end, the State commits itself to the establishment of institutional
12 and social mechanisms to support PWAs and their families. In this light, the State shall
13 institutionalize a holistic program for PWAs in the country that will be sensitive to their
14 needs for purposes of empowering and providing them quality of life.

15
16 SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this act, the following terms shall mean:

17
18 (a) *Autism or autism spectrum disorder* – refers to a range of conditions
19 characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and
20 nonverbal communication, as well as by unique strengths and differences. It
21 includes autism disorder, Asperger syndrome, Rett’s syndrome, and pervasive
22 developmental disorders not otherwise specified.

1 (b) *Diagnosis* – refers to medically necessary assessment, evaluations including
2 neuropsychological evaluations, genetic testing or other tests to diagnose
3 whether an individual has one of the autism spectrum disorders.
4

5 (c) *Treatment* – refers to those that are medically necessary, appropriate, effective
6 or efficient and shall include evaluation and assessment services; behavior
7 training and management and applied behavior analysis; habilitative or
8 rehabilitative care, including occupational, physical or speech therapy;
9 pharmacy care and medication; psychiatric care; psychological care; and
10 therapeutic care.
11

12 (d) *Intervention* - refers to any action or measure implemented to support and
13 enhance the developmental outcomes of individuals with autism. Such
14 intervention may include medical, pharmacological, therapeutic, educational,
15 or alternative habilitative approaches.
16

17 SEC. 4. *Epidemiological Surveillance Programs.* - The National Institute of
18 Health (NIH) is hereby mandated to conduct an annual epidemiological survey to
19 determine the extent and total incidence and prevalence of PWAs in the country in
20 order for the government to provide the necessary and appropriate interventions to
21 address the needs faced by PWAs.
22

23 The NIH is further mandated, in coordination with the Department of Health
24 (DOH), to strengthen its research focus on autism, review its investment into basic and
25 clinical research, expand its research into the link between environmental factors and
26 autism, and continue investigations into causation, diagnosis, early detection, and
27 treatment of autism spectrum disorders.
28

29 Such factors that will be studied shall include, among others, infection and
30 immune function, hormonal and reproductive factors, genetic factors, gastro-intestinal
31 factors, and socio-demographic factors.
32

33 SEC. 5. *Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Research Process.* – Within six
34 (6) months from the date of effectivity of this Act, the DOH shall issue the necessary
35 standards, guidelines, and regulations in order to ensure that there is no conflict of
36 interest, whatsoever, between the research subjects of researchers, drug
37 manufacturers, government agencies promoting the use of a particular vaccine, or
38 medicine for the treatment and rehabilitation of PWAs. The DOH shall ensure the
39 timely publication and dissemination of information of these guidelines and regulations
40 in order to ensure that the various health providers and stakeholders all over the
41 country are adequately informed.
42

43 SEC. 6. *Autism Council of the Philippines.* – There is hereby created an Autism
44 Council of the Philippines (“Council”) under the DOH which shall serve as an inter-
45 agency and multi-sectoral mechanism tasked to promote the implementation of the
46 National Autism Program of the government. The Council shall endeavor:
47

48 (a) To promote public awareness, education, and information on issues
49 concerning autism;
50

- (b) To establish sustainable networks of support groups for families of children and adults with autism;
- (c) To provide referral services to patients with autism and identify the appropriate educational and medical expertise and facilities suited to their needs;
- (d) To combat the spectrum of disorders related to autism through screening, education, early intervention, prompt referrals for treatment and services;
- (e) To undertake research and/or collaborate with other entities on research activities regarding autism in the Philippines;
- (f) To coordinate with schools in formulating individualized programs for school children and young students with autism;
- (g) To receive donations and grants from international donor institutions, foundations, and multilateral and bilateral foreign donor agencies involved in the prevention, cure and rehabilitation of PWAs;
- (h) To promote the advocacy against bias stereotyping of PWAs, thereby eliminating discrimination and/or misconceptions of the notion of being autistic with the end view of opening the doors of productive economic opportunities to PWAs;
- (i) To provide avenue for exchange information, exchange programs and sharing of best practices on issues relating to early detection, prevention, cure, treatment, and rehabilitation of PWAs;
- (j) To network with other organizations, institutions and professionals working for the promotion of legislation and public programs for PWAs; and
- (k) To assist in the creation of appropriate programs for PWAs.

SEC. 7. *Composition of the Autism Council of the Philippines.* – The Council shall be headed by the Secretary of Health as the Chairperson. It shall be composed of the following members:

- (a) The Secretary of Social Welfare and Development;
- (b) The Secretary of Education;
- (c) The Secretary of Labor;
- (d) The Chairperson of the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC);
- (e) The Chairperson of the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA);
- (f) The Head of the NIH;
- (g) The Head of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA);
- (h) One (1) representative from the duly accredited drug and vaccine manufacturers and distributors;
- (i) One (1) representative from the duly accredited association of caregivers in the Philippines;
- (j) One (1) representative from the duly accredited association of medical doctors in the Philippines;
- (k) One (1) representative from the Philippine Association of Occupational Therapists;
- (l) One (1) representative from the Autism Society Philippines or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the advocacy for the prevention, cure and rehabilitation of PWAs; and
- (m) One (1) individual with Autism.

1 Five (5) members of the Council coming from the representatives of the drug
2 and vaccine manufacturers and distributors; caregivers; nurses; medical doctors and
3 non-governmental organizations shall be appointed by the President of the
4 Philippines, from the list of three (3) nominees from each sector, who shall serve for a
5 term of three (3) years, and renewable for another term: *Provided*, That the person
6 appointed shall be of good moral character, unquestionable integrity, and with
7 expertise and experience of at least six (6) years in the field of autism, mental health
8 and other related fields: *Provided, further*, That in the event of a vacancy, the
9 successor appointed to fill the same shall serve only the unexpired portion of the term
10 of the member he/she succeeds to.

11
12 The members of the Council from the government agencies and institutions
13 may designate their permanent representatives who shall have a rank not lower than
14 Assistant Secretary or its equivalent, to attend meetings.

15
16 All members of the Council shall receive emoluments as may be determined by
17 the Council, in accordance with existing budget and accounting rules and regulations.

18
19 SEC. 8. *Meetings*. – The Council shall meet at least once a month upon a three-
20 day notice signed by the Chairperson or as often as necessary upon the written
21 request signed by two-thirds (2/3) of its members. The presence of a majority of the
22 members of the council shall constitute a quorum in order for it to conduct its business.

23
24 SEC. 9. *Programs and Services of the Autism Council of the Philippines*. – The
25 programs and services that will be provided by the Council shall include, among
26 others, the following:

- 27
28 (a) Orientation and counselling services for families of newly diagnosed
29 children with autism;
30 (b) Establishment of Family Support Networks and Sibling Program for the
31 families of PWAs to seek psycho-social support for the various problems
32 they face;
33 (c) Establishment of National and Regional Referral Services wherein the
34 Council will update a list of professionals and childcare institutions
35 concerned with the care and development of PWAs;
36 (d) Publication of reading materials, manuals and easily readable instruction
37 materials for autism early detection, prevention, rehabilitation and care;
38 (e) The conduct of continuing education, information and training programs and
39 lectures on the proper handling of PWAs;
40 (f) The establishment of a databank and information and monitoring system
41 (IMS) on the demographic, socio-economic and incidence and prevalence
42 of PWAs in the country;
43 (g) The publication of a newsletter on current developments, resources and
44 research on autism; and
45 (h) The conduct of continuing education/training of families, teachers,
46 therapists and caregivers of PWAs through seminars, conventions, online,
47 and other forms of tri-media educational tools.

48
49 SEC. 10. *Early Identification and Intervention for Children with Autism*. - The
50 Council is hereby mandated to establish a program for early identification, screening,

1 and detection of autism, and to provide the appropriate services to children and
2 toddlers with developmental delays associated with autism. The Council is tasked to
3 monitor and update the list of children diagnosed with autism in the country in its
4 central registry so that such persons may be referred to programs of the government,
5 should the same become available.

6
7 SEC. 11. *Treatment as Persons with Disabilities.* – All PWAs shall be treated
8 with disability as defined under Republic Act No. 7277, as amended. As such, they
9 shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and benefits provided for persons with
10 disabilities under existing laws.

11
12 SEC. 12. *Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage.* - All PWAs shall covered by the
13 National Health Insurance Program of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation
14 (PHIC). Funds necessary to ensure the enrolment of all PWAs who are not currently
15 covered under any existing category shall be sourced from the National Health
16 Insurance Fund of PHIC earmarked from the proceeds of sin tax collections as
17 provided for in Republic Act No. 10351. It shall likewise include the cost of early
18 detection and screening programs as one of the available benefits of its members.

19
20 SEC. 13. – *Continuing Education and Training of Health Personnel and Public*
21 *Service Providers on Autism.* - All officers and their staff in charge with providing
22 various developmental and welfare services to PWAs, including but not limited to the
23 Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development
24 (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education
25 (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Department
26 of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of
27 Transportation (DOTr), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG),
28 Department of National Defense (DND), Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC),
29 National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices
30 (PDAOs) at the Local Government Units (LGUs), Public Safety Units (military, police,
31 fire officers and other first responders) are mandated to undergo a mandatory
32 continuing education and training program to sensitize and empower service providers
33 to become effective frontliners in the delivery of health service to PWAs.

34
35 SEC. 14. *Protection against Forcible Use of Cures and Vaccines.* – The DOH
36 shall formulate the necessary guidelines, standards and procedures against the
37 forcible use of cures, vaccines, and therapies to PWAs in order to uphold the right of
38 every individual to give informed consent to medical treatment administered to them
39 as well as to protect their right to determine for themselves the medical treatment to
40 which they shall be subjected.

41
42 The DOH shall promulgate guidelines and standards to ensure that the
43 interventions and programs being provided by the government for PWAs do not violate
44 their basic human rights, particularly as regards their right to determine their own
45 decisions.

46
47 SEC. 15. *Protection against Discrimination in Schools and Training Institutions.*
48 – The DepEd, CHED, TESDA in coordination with the DOH, DSWD, CWC, and the
49 NIH, shall formulate the necessary implementing rules and regulations to ensure that
50 all educational institutions shall be free from policies and regulations discriminatory to

1 school children and young students with autism. Towards this end, the DepEd shall
2 adopt inclusive education policies, provide reasonable accommodations, and conduct
3 an annual education, information, and training program for school administrators,
4 faculty, and staff to empower them to effectively handle school children and young
5 students with autism.

6
7 SEC. 16. *Protection against Discrimination in Employment Opportunities.* – The
8 DOLE shall formulate and implement policies and programs to ensure that PWAs are
9 granted equal access to employment opportunities. Employers shall be encouraged
10 to provide reasonable accommodation, workplace adjustments, and skills
11 development programs tailored to the needs of PWAs, and no individual shall be
12 denied employment, promotion, or training opportunities on the basis of autism.

13
14 SEC. 17. *Protection against Discrimination in Public Transportation.* – The
15 DOTr shall establish and enforce accessibility and sensitivity standards across all
16 modes of transportation to ensure that PWAs can travel safely and comfortably.
17 Transport operators and personnel shall be required to undergo autism awareness
18 training and provide necessary assistance and accommodations to PWAs and their
19 companions.

20
21 SEC. 18. *Protection against Discrimination in Insurance Coverage.* - The
22 Department of Finance (DOF) shall develop or revise policies and guidelines to
23 guarantee that all insurance providers extend coverage to PWAs, including access to
24 life insurance products. Health insurance plans shall likewise encompass allied
25 medical services, such as occupational and speech therapies, as part of the benefits
26 available to policyholders.

27
28 SEC. 19. *Protection in cases of Disasters and Emergencies.* – The DILG, DND
29 and the NDRRMC shall formulate policies and protocols to ensure that the military,
30 public safety officers, LGUs, and first responders provide appropriate life-saving
31 assistance to PWAs, particularly those with behavioral and communication
32 challenges, during disasters and emergencies.

33
34 SEC. 20. *Reasonable Accommodation in Cases of Legal Action.* – The DOJ
35 shall formulate policies and protocols to ensure that all criminal justice agencies and
36 professionals provide appropriate accommodations and protections to PWAs with
37 behavioral and communication challenges who are accused of, victims of, or
38 witnesses to crimes.

39
40 SEC. 21. *Non-Discrimination of Adults with Autism.* - Within six (6) months
41 from the date of effectivity of this Act, the Council shall formulate the necessary
42 guidelines, standards, and regulations in order to ensure that adults with autism are
43 not discriminated against due to their condition. The Council shall ensure the timely
44 publication and dissemination of information of these guidelines and regulations in
45 order to ensure that the various stakeholders all over the country in the early detection,
46 prevention, rehabilitation, and care of PWAs are adequately informed.

47
48 SEC. 22. *Confidentiality of Medical Information for Persons with Autism.* – To
49 ensure that the early detection, screening tests, vaccination, medical treatment, and
50 rehabilitation of PWAs are implemented, the DOH, in consultation with the DOJ, shall

1 formulate the pertinent implementing rules and regulations to ensure the confidentiality
2 of the medical records of PWAs in order to protect the unwarranted intrusion into the
3 privacy of the person, particularly in relation to the medical condition of the patient.
4

5 SEC. 23. *Appropriation.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of
6 this Act shall be included and incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the
7 DOH.
8

9 SEC. 24. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within six (6) months from
10 the date of effectivity of this Act, the DOH, in coordination with the DSWD, DepEd,
11 CWC, NIH, NCDA, and PIA, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and
12 regulations to implement the provisions of this Act.
13

14 SEC. 25. *Reportorial Requirement.* – The DOH, in coordination with the Autism
15 Council of the Philippines and other implementing agencies concerned, shall submit
16 to the Congress of the Philippines, through the appropriate committees of both
17 Houses, an annual report on the implementation of this Act, including the
18 accomplishments, challenges encountered, and recommendations for further
19 legislative action, within sixty (60) days after the end of each calendar year.
20

21 SEC. 26. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared invalid
22 or unconstitutional, the provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force
23 and effect.
24

25 SEC. 27. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees,
26 presidential proclamations, letters of instruction, rules and regulations or parts thereof
27 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified
28 accordingly.
29

30 SEC. 28. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its
31 publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the
32 Philippines.

Approved,