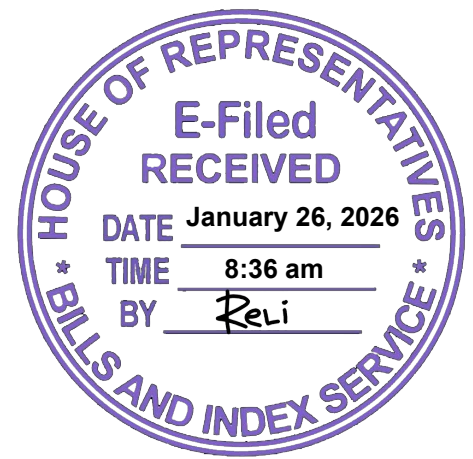


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **7292**



Introduced by Representative LEILA M. DE LIMA

AN ACT
TO FURTHER PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF JOURNALISTS, PROVIDING FOR
MANDATORY INSURANCE COVERAGE AND HAZARD PAY FOR EMPLOYEES
OF MEDIA ENTITIES ON FIELD ASSIGNMENTS, ONLINE JOURNALISTS, AND
FREELANCE JOURNALISTS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In an era when the role of a free, independent mass media has never been more central to democracy, rule of law, human rights, and public accountability, the working conditions of journalists remain insecure, under protected, and undervalued.

In the 2025 edition of the Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières/RSF) World Press Freedom Index, the Philippines climbed from 134th in 2024 to 116th place, the country's highest ranking in more than two (2) decades.¹ While this improvement merits recognition, RSF unfortunately continues to categorize the Philippines as a "difficult" environment for journalists.² In fact, the reality on the ground for many journalists tells a much different story.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) has pointed out that this improved ranking does not necessarily translate into better working or living conditions for media practitioners, and that the country's higher ranking largely reflects a global downturn in press freedom.³

Journalists experience threats, harassment, and killings. The Philippines remains one of Asia's most dangerous countries for journalists. Since 2022, NUJP has documented over 170 cases of attacks and violations against journalists under the

¹ Flores, H & Mateo, J. (03 May 2025). Philippine improves to 116th in press freedom rankings. Retrieved from: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/05/03/2440133/philippine-improves-116th-press-freedom-rankings?>

² *ibid*

³ National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) (2025) Statement | PH's press freedom ranking does not mean better conditions for media workers. Retrieved from: <https://nujp.org/statement-phs-press-freedom-ranking-does-not-mean-better-conditions-for-media-workers/?>

current administration.⁴ The murder of veteran journalist and publisher Johnny Dayang in Aklan on April 29, 2025⁵, and the recent killing of radio broadcaster Noel Bellen Samar in Albay in October 21, 2025⁶, underscore the continuing risk of violence and impunity.

Journalists experience economic insecurity and job losses. The recent change in ownership of the Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI), described as “integration,”⁷ has raised fears of job losses at the country’s newspaper of record.⁸ This highlights the larger structural issue of newsroom downsizing, contractualization, and the erosion of collective bargaining gains achieved over decades of union struggle.⁹ Freelance journalists, who form an increasing portion of the media workforce in the digital era, remain excluded from most employment-based protections, including health insurance, hazard pay, and equipment replacement in case of loss or damage during coverage.¹⁰

Journalists experience legal harassment and red-tagging. Journalists continue to face libel, cyber-libel, and other legal actions intended to harass, intimidate and silence critical reporting. Several media practitioners, such as journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio, remain detained under questionable circumstances¹¹, raising alarm over the weaponization of the law against journalists. While Cumpio’s case of illegal possession of firearms was dismissed, she was recently convicted for the crime of terrorism financing.¹²

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). (01 May 2025). Philippines: Veteran Filipino journalist shot dead in home. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/philippines-veteran-filipino-journalist-shot-dead-in-home>

⁶ International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). (23 October 2025). Philippines: Injured broadcaster dies after shooting attack. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/newsletters/detail/philippines-injured-broadcaster-dies-after-shooting-attack/category/press-releases>

⁷ Insider PH. (02 May 2025). Iconic newspaper Philippine Daily Inquirer merges print, digital operations in biggest shift in nearly 40-year history. Retrieved from: <https://insiderph.com/iconic-newspaper-philippine-daily-inquirer-merges-print-digital-operations-in-biggest-shift-in-nearly-40-year-history>

⁸ National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) (2025). Statement | PH’s press freedom ranking does not mean better conditions for media workers. Retrieved from: <https://nujp.org/statement-phs-press-freedom-ranking-does-not-mean-better-conditions-for-media-workers/>

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (03 October 2024). #IFJBlog: Organising Freelance Journalists – Lessons from the Philippines. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/freelancers-rights/article/ifjblog-organising-freelance-journalists-lessons-from-the-philippines>

¹¹ Froger, A. (24 July 2025). Frenchie Mae Cumpio: investigation into a fabricated case designed to convict a Philippine journalist. Retrieved from: <https://rsf.org/en/frenchie-mae-cumpio-investigation-fabricated-case-designed-convict-philippine-journalist>

¹² Gabieta, J. (23 January 2026), Journalist, church worker found guilty of “terrorism financing”. Retrieved from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2172163/journalist-church-worker-found-guilty-of-terrorism-financing>

In light of these realities, there is urgency for legislation that will uphold the welfare and further protect the rights of journalists and employees of media entities on field assignments, staff and freelancers alike, by providing hazard coverage, disability and death benefits, medical and mental health supports, equipment insurance for freelancers, and robust safety protocols.

This bill recognizes that the working conditions of journalists remain challenging. This measure seeks to put in place a framework and system of protection for the welfare of journalists and employees of media entities on field assignments, staff, including those working on online and on freelance. It is hoped that, with this bill and other related interventions, journalism as a profession will be strengthened, honoring our commitment that journalists should no longer work in fear, precarity, or any other form of insecurity.

This bill draws inspiration from Senate Bill No. 1860 and Senate Bill No. 1523, filed by this Representation in the Seventeenth (17th) and Eighteenth (18th) Congresses, respectively, and has been refined through consultations with media partners and practitioners. In the Twentieth (20th) Congress, a similar measure was filed by Senator Camille A. Villar as Senate Bill No. 322.

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



LEILA M. DE LIMA

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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 “*Journalists’ Welfare*
2 *and Protection Act of 2025.*”
3

4 SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – The State recognizes the invaluable role of the
5 free press in the vitality and vibrancy of democracy, as well as the promotion of
6 responsible citizenship and good governance. Towards this end, the State shall
7 provide the necessary support to ensure that our journalists are properly compensated
8 and insured as they practice their profession.
9

10 SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* - For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall
11 mean:
12

13 (a) *Conflict Areas* — refer to any geographical area where there exists actual
14 and sustained armed violence between government forces and one or more organized
15 armed groups, or among such groups, of sufficient intensity and organization such that
16 international humanitarian law may apply, and which adversely affects civilian life,
17 safety, or infrastructure. It does not include isolated or sporadic incidents of violence,
18 civil disturbances, or law enforcement operations of limited scope.
19

20 (b) *Difficult areas* – refer to any geographical location where the safety, mobility,
21 communication or logistical circumstances are significantly impaired due to
22 remoteness, lack of infrastructure or communication facilities, presence of armed

1 actors, or other heightened operational hazards beyond those present in ordinary
2 journalism environments.

3
4 (c) *Disaster Area* — refers to any locality or region affected by a natural
5 calamity, where a naturally triggered event such as a typhoon, flood, earthquake,
6 volcanic eruption, landslide, drought, or similar phenomenon has caused severe
7 disruption of normal community life, resulting in widespread loss or damage and
8 impeding safe and effective journalism operations.

9
10 (d) *Disease-Stricken Area* - refers to any locality, community, or region officially
11 declared by competent health authorities as affected by an outbreak, epidemic, or
12 pandemic of a communicable, contagious, or infectious disease that poses a
13 significant threat to public health and safety.

14
15 (e) *Editorial and/or News Department* - refers to editors-in-chief, news editors,
16 columnists, deskmen, reporters, correspondents, and photographers on the part of
17 the print media; and news editors, newscasters, commentators/announcers, field
18 reporters, field correspondents, and cameramen on the part of the online and
19 broadcast media.

20
21 (f) *Freelance Journalist* – refers to journalists engaged in the production of
22 news, whether in audio, photo, research, text, or video form, for any local or
23 international outlet, without any exclusivity or restrictions from these outlets. Freelance
24 journalists and freelancer shall be used interchangeably.

25
26 (g) *Front-line media persons* — specifically refer to those directly involved in
27 data-gathering from the field, and news reporting whether in print on television or on
28 radio, such as, but not limited to, print reporters, cameramen, photojournalists, radio
29 reporter and television reporters.

30
31 (h) *Journalism* — the gathering, writing, editing, processing and dissemination
32 of news and production or publishing of newspapers and other such publications such
33 as magazines and pamphlets and other processes through wire, wireless,
34 broadcasting, and online services.

35
36 (i) *Journalist* — shall mean any member of the Editorial and/or News
37 Department including front-line media persons.

38
39 (j) *Media Entities* – refer to either media organizations and alliances or
40 newsroom.

41
42 (k) *Media Organizations and Alliances* – refer to duly recognized organizations
43 of media practitioners, whose main function is to monitor, uphold, and ensure the
44 protection of media practitioner's rights, collectively air grievances, protect press
45 freedom and are duly accredited by and duly registered with the Securities and
46 Exchange Commission (SEC) and by any reputable association of media persons
47 such as, but not limited to Philippine Press Institute (PPI), Foreign Correspondents
48 Association of the Philippines (FOCAP), Photojournalists' Center of the Philippines

(PCP), National Press Club (NPC), National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) and Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas (KBP).

(l) *Newsroom* — refers to all companies in the print, broadcast and online media (i.e., radio, television and newspapers) that are involved in the gathering and dissemination of news and information for public consumption and are duly registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and accredited by any reputable association of media persons such as, but not limited to, the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) and People's Alternative Media Network (Altermidya).

(m) *Online journalist* - refers to any individual who is professionally engaged in the gathering, writing, editing, producing, and dissemination of news and information through digital or internet-based platforms.

SEC. 4. *Coverage.* - This Act shall apply to all permanent, temporary, contractual, casual and freelance journalists employed by all existing media entities in the Philippines.

SEC. 5. *Mandatory Additional Insurance Benefits for Journalists, Online Journalist and Employees of Media Entities on Field Assignments.* - In addition to the current insurance benefits provided to journalists and employees of media entities on field assignments by the Social Security System (SSS) as mandated under Republic Act No. 8282, otherwise known as the "Social Security Law", by the PhilHealth as mandated under Republic Act No. 7875 as amended, and by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) under Republic Act No. 8291, there shall be an additional insurance coverage to be provided by media entities to journalists and their employees on field assignments and front-line media persons which shall provide the following minimum benefits:

(1) Disability Benefits of Three Hundred Fifty Thousand Pesos (₱350,000.00) for all mass media practitioners who shall suffer total or partial disability, whether permanent or temporary, as a result of any injury sustained during performance of duty;

(2) Death benefits amounting to Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱300,000.00) for all mass media practitioners and employees on field assignment who shall perish in the line of duty;

(3) Reimbursement of actual medical costs up to Two Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱200,000.00) for all mass media practitioners and employees on field assignments who shall be hospitalized or who shall require medical attendance for injuries sustained while in the performance of duty; and

(4) Reimbursement of actual cost of diagnosis, psychiatric or psychological treatment, counseling, and prescribed medication of up to Two Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱200,000.00) for all mass media practitioners and employees who, as a result of exposure to traumatic, distressing, or hazardous events in the performance of duty,

1 shall suffer psychological or mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress
2 disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depression, or related trauma-induced conditions.

3
4 The media entity shall have the option of selecting the insuring entity and shall
5 be responsible for paying the insurance premiums for their journalists and employees.
6 *Provided*, that this provision shall not apply to media entities regularly employing less
7 than ten employees or in establishments exempted from granting this benefit by the
8 Secretary of Labor and Employment after considering the scale of operations, viability
9 or financial condition of such entity.

10
11 SEC. 6. *Insurance for Freelance Journalists.* - The SSS and GSIS shall create
12 a special insurance program for freelance journalists. They shall offer the opportunity
13 for freelance journalists to secure supplementary insurance coverage before working
14 in war zones or difficult areas.

15
16 This special insurance program shall also cover the professional equipment
17 used in the performance of their journalistic duties, including but not limited to
18 cameras, video and audio recorders, drones, laptops, mobile devices, data storage,
19 and communication tools of freelance journalists, subject to proof of ownership and
20 actual loss or damage.

21
22 The insurance shall cover loss, theft, damage, or destruction of such equipment
23 arising from:

- 24
25 (a) Coverage or assignment in conflict areas, difficult areas, or disaster areas,
26 as defined under this Act;
27 (b) Accidents, violence, or natural hazards encountered during fieldwork; or
28 (c) Other risks incidental to the lawful exercise of journalistic functions.

29
30 Coverage shall not extend to loss or damage due to negligence, misuse, or
31 intentional acts of the journalist, or to equipment not used in the exercise of journalistic
32 functions.

33
34 SEC. 7. *Grant of Hazard Pay.* - All journalists, employees of media entities on
35 field assignments and freelance journalists deployed in difficult areas, conflict areas,
36 disaster areas, and diseases-stricken areas, shall be compensated with hazard pay
37 equivalent to Five-hundred pesos (₱500.00) per day or twenty-five percent (25%) of
38 their gross monthly basic salary, whichever is higher, for the duration of such
39 deployment. This amount and rate shall be reviewed and may be revised, but not in
40 any way diminished, by the Secretary of Labor and Employment every three (3) years
41 from effectivity of this Act.

42
43 SEC. 8. *Tax Exemption and Non-Diminution of Benefits.* — Hazard pay for
44 journalists, employees of media entities on field assignments and freelance journalists
45 shall not be subject to tax and nothing in this Act shall be construed as to diminish, in
46 any manner, any benefit granted by existing laws, rules and regulations and other
47 issuances especially favorable to said journalists and employees of media entities.

1 Sec. 9. *Prohibited Acts.* - The following acts shall be prohibited:

2
3 (a) Refusal or failure by a media entity to provide additional insurance coverage
4 referred to in Section 5 of this Act;

5
6 (b) Refusal or failure by a media entity to provide hazard pay referred to in
7 Section 7 of this Act;

8
9 (c) Refusal by an insurance company to enroll journalists, including employees
10 of mass media entities on field assignment and freelance journalists on account
11 of the nature of their work; and

12
13 (d) Non-compliance with the rules and regulations that the GSIS, SSS, and PIA
14 shall adopt for the implementation of this Act.

15
16 SEC. 10. *Penal Provisions.* - Any person who shall willfully commit any of the
17 prohibited acts enumerated under this Act shall, upon conviction, be punished by a
18 fine not less than Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱300,000.00) but not more than
19 Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱500,000.00) or imprisonment of not less than one
20 (1) year but not more than six (6) years or both depending upon the discretion of the
21 court. *Provided*, that if the offender is a public official, in addition to the penalties stated
22 in the preceding paragraph, the penalty of perpetual disqualification from office shall
23 be imposed.

24
25 In the case of associations, partnerships or corporations, the penalty shall be
26 imposed on the partner, president, chief operating officer, chief executive officer,
27 directors or officers responsible for the violation, and cancellation of registration with
28 the SEC.

29
30 SEC. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* — The GSIS, SSS, PIA, and in
31 consultation with the NPC, NUJP, KBP and other duly registered media associations,
32 shall promulgate and issue the rules and regulations necessary to implement the
33 provisions of this Act.

34
35 SEC. 12. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees,
36 presidential proclamations, letters of instructions, rules and regulations or parts thereof
37 which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified
38 accordingly.

39
40 SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.* - If any part of this Act is declared
41 unconstitutional, the remaining provisions shall remain valid.

42
43 SEC. 14. *Effectivity Clause.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
44 publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,