

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 7444



Introduced by Rep. FERDINAND ALEXANDER A. MARCOS
1st District, Ilocos Norte

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution provides in Article II, Section 15 that “the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them.” It likewise declares in Article II, Section 11 that “the State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights.” These constitutional guarantees find their most urgent application in the protection of the first responders and rescuers who, with courage and sacrifice, serve as the country’s first line of defense against danger, disaster, and death.

First responders and rescuers, whether firefighters, emergency medical personnel, search-and-rescue workers, disaster risk reduction officers, or trained volunteers, perform functions under peril. Because the Philippines is a typhoon-prone archipelago, they operate in a setting where heavy rains, flooding, and storm surges are expected every year. The past typhoons and calamities revealed that they have stood as the Philippines’ front line during increasingly severe typhoons. Their service reflects extraordinary dedication, yet also exposes persistent gaps in resources, welfare benefits, and institutional support. Existing legal and administrative protections remain fragmented.

The Legislative has enacted several laws that manifested its intent to enshrine sector-specific rights and benefits, such as, Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of Public Health Workers,” Republic Act No. 9710, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of Women,” and Republic Act No. 11058, or the “Occupational Safety and Health Standards Law”. However, no comprehensive Magna Carta yet exists to address the needs, risks, and contributions of first responders and rescuers.

This proposed measure seeks to fill that gap. It establishes a statutory framework to institutionalize the rights, benefits, and protections necessary to safeguard these frontline personnel. Those who protect the lives of others at the cost of their own safety deserve more than symbolic appreciation. They deserve enforceable guarantees that reflect the magnitude of the risks they face. The measure likewise acknowledges the reality that many of them save the lives of strangers while their own families, homes, and communities remain exposed to the same hazards. They cannot fully protect the

public unless the government adequately protects them and their families. Accordingly, the bill provides a comprehensive package of benefits and support systems to ensure that they are fully assisted before, during, and after deployment. This seeks to uphold their welfare and fortify the nation's resilience by ensuring that they are equipped, protected, and valued.

Thus, the immediate approval of this bill is earnestly sought.


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AN ACT
INSTITUTING A MAGNA CARTA OF FIRST RESPONDERS AND
RESCUERS, PROVIDING FOR THEIR RIGHTS, BENEFITS, AND
PROTECTIONS, ESTABLISHING INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS,
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

CHAPTER I
TITLE, DECLARATION OF POLICY, AND COVERAGE

SECTION 1. Short Title. This Act shall be known as the “*Magna Carta of First Responders and Rescuers.*”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. The State recognizes the indispensable role of first responders and rescuers in safeguarding life, property, and the environment during disasters, calamities, emergencies, and other crisis situations. It is the policy of the State to:

- a. Promote and improve the social and economic well-being of first responders and rescuers, their living and working conditions, and terms of employment;
- b. Develop their skills, competencies, and capabilities to ensure readiness and efficiency in delivering life-saving services;
- c. Provide a system of benefits, incentives, and protection commensurate with the risks they face; and
- d. Encourage highly qualified individuals to join and remain in service as first responders and rescuers.

SEC. 3. Coverage. This Act shall apply to all individuals, whether employed in the public or private sector or serving as accredited volunteers, who are engaged in

emergency response and rescue operations. Covered personnel include, but are not limited to:

- a. Firefighters and members of accredited fire volunteer brigades;
- b. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), paramedics, and other pre-hospital emergency providers;
- c. Search-and-rescue personnel;
- d. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) officers and personnel directly involved in response and rescue missions;
- e. Members of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and other agencies mobilized for emergency response;
- f. Individuals accredited, mobilized, or recognized under the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices (LDRRMOs), and DRRM offices created under law; and
- g. Other legally recognized emergency, crisis, and disaster response professionals and accredited volunteers.

SEC. 4. Definition of Terms. For purposes of this Act: [Note: The terms being defined are usually arranged alphabetically]

- a. *Accredited Volunteer or Auxiliary Responders and Rescuers* refer to individuals or organizations officially recognized by national or local DRRM authorities to provide rescue, medical, logistical, or humanitarian assistance during disasters or emergencies.
- b. *Capacity-Building* refers to systematic training, education, equipment support, and professional development provided to enhance the operational effectiveness of first responders and rescuers.
- c. *Disaster* refers to a serious disruption in the functioning of a community or society involving widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses and impacts that exceed local capacity, necessitating the mobilization of first responders and rescuers.
- d. *Emergency* refers to an unforeseen or sudden occurrence requiring immediate action to prevent loss of life, injury, or damage to property.
- e. *First Responders or Responders* refer to individuals or units, trained and accredited, whether professional, volunteer, or auxiliary, who are first to arrive

and provide immediate assistance during emergencies, accidents, disasters, or crises, including but not limited to emergency medical personnel, firefighters, law enforcement officers engaged in rescue operations, search-and-rescue units, civil defense and DRRM officers, and other duly accredited personnel.

- f. *Hazard Pay* refers to additional compensation granted to first responders and rescuers by reason of risks inherent in their duties.
- g. *Occupational Safety* refers to the set of laws, standards, and practices that protect first responders and rescuers from occupational hazards, injuries, and illnesses in the performance of their duties.
- h. *Psychosocial Support* refers to structured services and interventions designed to address the mental health and well-being of first responders and rescuers exposed to traumatic events.
- i. *Rescuers* refer to specialized individuals or groups, trained and accredited, who engage in search, rescue, and retrieval operations in situations of danger, disaster, or emergency to save lives and protect property.
- j. *Responder's Insurance* refers to a government-mandated insurance program covering death, permanent disability, medical treatment, hospitalization, and other contingencies arising from service-related incidents of the first responders and rescuers.

CHAPTER II

RIGHTS, BENEFITS, AND INCENTIVES

SEC. 5. Rights of First Responders and Rescuers. They shall enjoy the following rights:

- a. *Right to Life and Safety.* To be provided with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), training, and safety protocols before deployment;
- b. *Right to Compensation and Benefits.* To receive salaries, allowances, hazard pay, and insurance commensurate to the risks of their service;
- c. *Right to Social Protection.* To be covered by government social insurance systems, including PhilHealth, GSIS/SSS, ECC, and the Responder's Insurance created under this Act;
- d. *Right to Medical and Psychosocial Care.* To access free healthcare, rehabilitation, and psychosocial services for injuries, illnesses, or trauma sustained in the line of duty;
- e. *Right to Education and Training.* To receive continuing professional education, skills enhancement, and priority access to training programs;

- f. *Right to Job Security and Non-Discrimination.* To be protected against unjust termination, discrimination, or denial of benefits by reason of sex, gender, religion, political affiliation, or disability;
- g. *Right to Legal Assistance.* To free legal aid in connection with service-related charges or complaints;
- h. *Right to Association.* To form unions, associations, or cooperatives consistent with law; and
- i. *Right to be Free from Obstruction.* To be protected from obstruction, harassment, or assault while performing duties. Any act that hinders or delays them shall be penalized.

SEC. 6. Occupational Safety and Health. Employers shall ensure a safe and healthy working environment, including the provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), risk-based deployment protocols, mental health support, and compliance with relevant occupational safety and health standards and applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

SEC. 7. Hazard Pay.

- a. First responders and rescuers in the public sector shall be entitled to hazard pay equivalent to at least twenty-five percent (25%) of their monthly basic salary during periods of deployment and operations.
- b. Accredited volunteer responders and rescuers shall receive hazard allowances equivalent to not less than ₱1,000 per day in every active deployment, chargeable to the calamity fund or Quick Response Fund of the concerned LGU or national agency.

SEC. 8. Insurance Coverage. There is hereby established a Mandatory Responder's Insurance Program, to be administered by the GSIS (for government personnel) and the SSS (for accredited volunteers), with the following minimum benefits:

- a. *Death Benefit.* ₱500,000 in case of death in the line of duty of the responders and rescuers;
- b. *Permanent Total Disability.* ₱400,000 lump sum plus lifetime monthly pension equivalent to 75% of the basic salary (for government-employed responders and rescuers);
- c. *Temporary Disability.* Daily income benefit equivalent to 90% of average daily wage for up to six (6) months;

- d. *Medical Reimbursement.* Up to ₱200,000 for hospitalization, medicines, and rehabilitation; and
- e. *Burial Benefit.* ₱50,000 to immediate heirs.

Premiums for accredited volunteers shall be subsidized by the National Government and LGUs.

SEC. 9. Medical, Health, and Psychosocial Services. They shall be entitled to the following:

- a. Mandatory PhilHealth, GSIS/SSS, and Pag-IBIG coverage;
- b. State-funded group life, accident, and mental health insurance;
- c. Access to State-funded trauma recovery programs, peer support, and mental health professionals;
- d. All responders and rescuers shall be entitled to free medical examinations at least once a year;
- e. Responders and rescuers injured in the line of duty shall be entitled to immediate treatment in any public or private hospital, expenses to be shouldered by PhilHealth, ECC, or the Responder's Insurance; and
- f. Responders and rescuers exposed to traumatic events shall be entitled to mandatory psychosocial debriefing within seventy-two (72) hours, and continuing mental health services as needed.

SEC. 10. Scholarships and Educational Assistance. The legitimate children of fallen or permanently disabled responders and rescuers shall be entitled to full scholarships in public elementary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, including free tuition, miscellaneous fees, and book allowances. For those enrolled in private schools, the government shall provide a subsidy equivalent to the average tuition and fees of comparable public institutions. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Department of Education (DepEd) shall jointly administer the program.

SEC. 11. Housing, Livelihood, and Other Benefits.

- a. Responders, rescuers, and their families shall be given priority access to government housing programs under the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD).
- b. The surviving families of responders and rescuers who perish in the line of duty shall be granted livelihood assistance packages to be jointly implemented by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Labor and

Employment (DOLE), in coordination with the Local Government Units (LGUs) concerned.

- c. Responders and rescuers shall be entitled to discounts in government-operated transportation during official duties, subject to guidelines of the Department of Transportation (DOTr).

SEC. 12. Allowances and Stipends.

- a. *Laundry Allowance.* Three Hundred Pesos (₱300.00) per month or equivalent in kind;
- b. *Protracted Deployment Stipend.* For extended or high-intensity operations, as determined by the National First Responders Welfare Council (NFRWC); and
- c. *Subsistence Allowance.* While in the conduct of actual response and rescue, they shall be entitled to full subsistence allowance of three (3) meals which may be computed in accordance with prevailing circumstances.

The amounts of allowances and stipends prescribed under this Section shall be regarded as the minimum entitlements. Any increase or adjustment shall be determined by the National First Responders Welfare Council, taking into account prevailing national and international standards, the rate of inflation, fiscal sustainability, and other relevant economic and social indicators: Provided, That in no case shall such adjustments operate to diminish or reduce the benefits already granted under this Act or under any other existing law, decree, executive order, issuance, or collective bargaining agreement more favorable to the first responders and rescuers.

SEC. 13. Leave Privileges. First responders and rescuers, other than volunteers and auxiliaries, shall be entitled to the following:

- a. *Service Leave.* Fifteen (15) working days annually;
- b. *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Leave.* Ten (10) working days following exposure to trauma, subject to psychological evaluation;
- c. *Special Privilege Leave.* Fifteen (15) working days annually.

The leave privileges granted under this Act shall be without prejudice to, and shall be enjoyed in addition to, all other leave benefits already provided under existing laws, including but not limited to the Civil Service rules, the Labor Code of the Philippines, collective bargaining agreements, and other relevant and applicable laws, rules, and regulations; Provided, That the leave privileges granted under this Act shall not accrue, accumulate, or be carried over from year to year, and shall not be converted into commutable or cumulative credits, nor shall they be subject to monetization for unused balances.

SEC. 14. Benefits for Dependents. Dependents of first responders and rescuers shall enjoy:

- a. *Survivorship Benefits*, which shall be enjoyed by the surviving families of responders or rescuers who perish in the line of duty;
- b. *Death Gratuity* of not less than Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱500,000.00); and
- c. *Full Scholarship* for up to two (2) children, inclusive of tuition, books, and living allowances, in CHED- or TESDA-accredited institutions.
- d. *PhilHealth* enrollment and *free annual medical check-up* in a government-funded hospital during the lifetime of the responder and rescuer;
- e. *Preferential access* to DSWD social services;
- f. *Training and employment assistance* through TESDA, DOLE, and PESO; and
- g. *Legal representation* through PAO for cases or proceedings necessary for the claim of their benefits.

SEC. 15. Tax Exemptions. Hazard pay, insurance benefits, and allowances received by responders and rescuers under this Act shall be exempt from income tax.

SEC. 16. Retirement and Longevity Benefits. Government-employed responders and rescuers shall retire under the same retirement system applicable to uniformed services, with mandatory retirement at age 60 or after at least 20 years of service, whichever comes earlier.

Accredited volunteer responders and rescuers shall be entitled to a volunteer service credit system, convertible into additional retirement points under SSS, subject to implementing rules of the GSIS and/or SSS and other relevant government agencies.

SEC. 17. Career Development. The State shall provide training, scholarships, certification, and merit-based promotion systems to ensure professional growth.

SEC. 18. Gender Sensitivity and Inclusion. Gender-responsive and inclusive policies in uniforms, facilities, deployments, and grievance mechanisms shall be integrated.

SEC. 19. Non-Discrimination. No first responder or rescuer shall be discriminated against on the basis of sex, age, civil status, disability, religion, or other status, consistent with constitutional guarantees and existing statutes.

CHAPTER III INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

SEC. 20. National First Responders Welfare Council (NFRWC). A Council under the Office of the President is hereby created to be known as the National First Responders Welfare Council.

It shall be headed by the Secretaries, or their duly designated representatives with a rank of at least Assistant Secretary, of the following agencies: the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), the Department of Finance, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). In addition, there shall be three (3) representatives from duly recognized first responder and rescuer organizations in the private sector: Provided, That, at least one (1) of whom shall be female.

The Secretary of the Interior and Local Government, or duly designated representative, shall serve as Chairperson, and he/she shall vote only in case of a tie. The Secretary of Health, or duly designated representative, shall be the Vice-Chairperson.

The NFRWC shall have the following powers and functions:

- a. Formulate policies and guidelines;
- b. Conduct welfare audits;
- c. Resolve administrative grievances;
- d. Coordinate with the NDRRMC for integration of responder and rescuer welfare into disaster preparedness, response, and rehabilitation;
- e. Review, evaluate, and recommend the adjustment or enhancement of the benefits, allowances, and incentives granted to first responders and rescuers under this Act, subject to the availability of funds and in accordance with existing laws, rules, and regulations of the concerned government agencies; and
- f. Oversee compliance by national agencies and LGUs.

SEC. 21. Local Government Responsibilities. LGUs shall:

- a. Establish accredited response units;
- b. Allocate funds for personnel welfare; and
- c. Ensure regular training and coordination with national systems.

SEC. 22. National Registry. The DILG, together with the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), shall maintain an annually updated National Registry of First Responders and Rescuers for deployment, benefits, and recognition.

SEC. 23. Accreditation, Mobilization, and Protection of First Responders and Rescuers. Government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector entities, and local government units (LGUs) may mobilize accredited first responders, rescuers, and organized volunteers to augment their respective personnel complement and logistical requirements in disaster risk reduction, emergency response, and humanitarian assistance operations.

The agencies, CSOs, private sector entities, and LGUs concerned shall take full responsibility for the enhancement, welfare, and protection of such responders and rescuers, and shall submit the roster of accredited personnel to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), through the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices (LDRRMOs), for inclusion in the National Registry of First Responders and Rescuers.

Accreditation shall be carried out at the municipal or city level, under uniform guidelines formulated by the NFRWC. The expenses and fees entailed in the training and certification shall be shouldered by the concerned public or private offices.

Not all monetary and leave rights, benefits, and incentives enumerated in this Act shall automatically extend to accredited volunteer or auxiliary responders or rescuers; Provided, However, That the accredited volunteer or auxiliary first responder or rescuer who incurs death or injury in the line of duty shall be entitled to compensatory benefits, medical care, and personnel accident insurance, in accordance with the Chapter II of this Act.

CHAPTER IV ADMINISTRATIVE AND IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS

SEC. 24. Appropriations. The initial funding requirements for the implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the agencies concerned. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the agencies' yearly budgets under the General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 25. Implementing Rules. Within ninety (90) days, the NFRWC, in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), DOF, OCD, GSIS, SSS, DHSUD, DOTr, DepEd, CHED, and Civil Service Commission (CSC), shall promulgate the IRR of this Act.

SEC. 26. Enforcement. The NFRWC shall exercise quasi-judicial authority over violations of this Act, with penalties including fines of up to Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱500,000.00), suspension, dismissal, or delisting.

SEC. 27. Judicial Recourse. Affected individuals may seek remedies before the CSC, DOLE, or other competent agencies, which decision or resolution shall be appealable to the Court of Appeals under the Rules of Court.

SEC. 28. Separability Clause. If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 29. Repealing Clause. All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 30. Effectivity Clause. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,