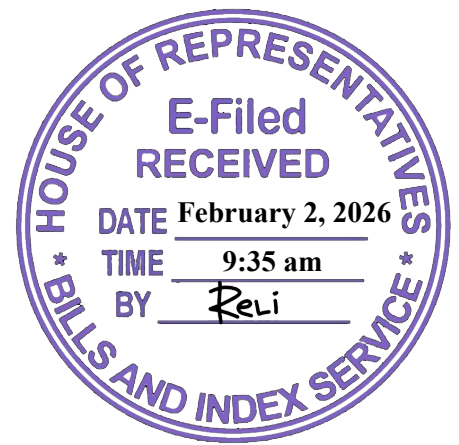


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **7521**



Introduced by **REP. NATHANIEL “Atty. Nat” M. ODUCCADO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution mandates the State to protect life and promote the general welfare. A safe and reliable transportation system is essential to this duty, yet transportation accidents continue to cause preventable deaths, injuries, and significant economic losses nationwide.

Recent data underscore the seriousness of the problem. In 2024, more than 31,000 road accidents were recorded nationwide, resulting in 2,747 deaths, while Metro Manila alone experienced over 62,000 road crashes. Maritime accidents have likewise claimed thousands of lives in recent years, with recent incidents highlighting persistent safety gaps. Notably, on January 26, 2026, the passenger ferry MV *Trisha Kerstin 3* capsized off Sulu province, resulting in at least 18 deaths and leaving scores missing. The ferry carried over 300 passengers and crew, and while 316 were rescued, the tragedy underscores the high risk of maritime transport in the Philippines. Similarly, the Davao Gulf boat mishap involving the recreational motor banca MBCA Amejara, which sailed without proper clearance en route to Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, resulted in 14 missing persons out of 15 on board, with only one rescued despite ongoing search operations. Although aviation and railway accidents occur less frequently, they involve high-risk systems where failures can result in mass casualties and severe economic disruption. Studies estimate that a single road accident may cost as much as ₱3.47 million, placing the annual economic burden of transportation accidents at well over ₱100 billion, exclusive of indirect costs such as lost productivity, long-term disability, and trauma to families and communities.

The urgency of strengthening transportation safety is therefore evident. This bill declares the policy of the State to ensure a safe maritime and railway transportation system by prioritizing the protection of life and property. It affirms that transportation safety investigations must be independent, professional, and focused on prevention rather than the determination of fault or liability, recognizing the vital role of maritime transport in an archipelagic nation and the expanding importance of railway systems in national development.

To this end, the bill establishes the Philippine Transport Safety Authority (PTSA) as an independent and collegial body with fiscal, administrative, and operational independence. The PTSA addresses the long-standing problem of fragmented accident investigation in the Philippines, where agencies currently investigate accidents within sectors they also regulate, resulting in overlapping authority, inconsistent standards, data gaps, delayed safety interventions, and potential conflicts of interest. The bill provides clear and uniform definitions of key terms to ensure consistent application of the law and to reinforce the principle that safety investigations are conducted solely to determine causes and contributing factors for the prevention of future occurrences. It further ensures the functional independence of the PTSA from regulatory bodies,

¹Philstar (2025) Road crash fatalities up 35% in 2024 – HPG. Available at <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/02/02/2418573/road-crash-fatalities-35-2024-hpg> (last accessed December 29, 2025)

law enforcement agencies, and prosecution authorities, thereby separating safety investigation from regulation and enforcement and shifting the focus from liability to systemic risk reduction.

International experience demonstrates that transportation safety improves when accident investigations are conducted by an independent, no-blame, multimodal authority. Countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada have adopted this model, with measurable reductions in accidents and high implementation rates of safety recommendations. These examples show that prioritizing prevention over punishment enhances safety outcomes while strengthening public trust through transparency. The PTSA adopts this proven approach, adapted to the Philippine context.

The bill provides for a governing Board with defined qualifications, terms, and safeguards to ensure competence, integrity, and technical expertise in maritime safety, railway safety, accident investigation, and systems engineering or human factors. It likewise enumerates the powers and functions of the PTSA to ensure thorough, timely, and evidence-based investigations, while allowing rescue operations and public safety measures to proceed without undue delay.

Finally, the bill rationalizes existing laws by transferring safety investigation functions from regulatory agencies to the PTSA, while retaining regulatory, licensing, and enforcement powers with the appropriate authorities. It provides for transition mechanisms, inter-agency cooperation, appropriations, implementing rules and regulations, and standard effectivity provisions to ensure effective implementation.

By establishing a unified and independent transportation safety investigation authority, this measure seeks to reduce transportation-related deaths and injuries, lessen the economic burden of accidents, strengthen institutional accountability, and restore public confidence in the country's transportation systems.

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



REP. NATHANIEL "ATTY. NAT" M. ODOCADO
1 Tahanan Party List

² Reuters (2026). Death toll in Philippine boat accident climbs to 15, hundreds rescued. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/seven-killed-scores-missing-passenger-ferry-capsizes-off-south-ern-philippines-2026-01-26/>

³ Reuters (2026). Divers to be deployed in search for missing in Philippine ferry sinking. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rescue-efforts-under-way-after-philippine-ferry-sinks-leaving-18-dead-2026-01-26/>

⁴ Sunstar (2026). PCG rescues 1, searches for 14 missing in Davao Gulf boat mishap. Available at https://www.sunstar.com.ph/davao/pcg-rescues-1-searches-for-14-missing-in-davao-gulf-boat-mishap?fbclid=IwDGRjcAPcwjJjbGNrA9zCLGV4dG4DYWVtAjExAHNyGMGYXBwX2lkDDM1MDY4NTUzMTcyOAABHtA0_8UveKVCaQkSCs3uX7xrXvtQ_a_FciPHUdbR2sBySAqqvYBEIZkSq-eF_aem_uJEy8qc6Uyyu5eqtxrxS6A

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **7521**

Introduced by **REP. NATHANIEL “ATTY. NAT” M. ODUCAO**

**AN ACT CREATING THE PHILIPPINE TRANSPORT SAFETY AUTHORITY,
RATIONALIZING AND AMENDING EXISTING LAWS ON MARITIME AND
RAILWAY ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND SAFETY OVERSIGHT, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES**

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Philippine Transport Safety Authority Act.*”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to protect life and property by ensuring a safe maritime and railway transportation system. The State recognizes that transportation accidents cause serious loss of life and economic damage and that safety investigations must be independent, professional, and focused on prevention rather than blame or liability. The State further recognizes the critical importance of maritime transport to the archipelagic nature of the Philippines and the growing role of railway systems in national development.

The State further declares that the protection of life requires strict compliance with minimum safety standards in the operation of maritime and railway transport. Overloading, failure to provide adequate safety equipment, and failure to conduct regular emergency preparedness and evacuation drills constitute grave threats to public safety. Where such violations are established, the law shall presume negligence on the part of the transport operator or company, without prejudice to the right to due process and the conduct of independent safety investigations.

SEC. 3. *Creation of the Philippine Transport Safety Authority.* – There is hereby created the Philippine Transport Safety Authority (PTSA), an independent and collegial body with fiscal, administrative, and operational independence, primarily responsible for investigating transportation accidents and incidents for safety and prevention purposes.

SEC. 4. *Definitions.* – For purposes of this Act, the following terms are defined as follows:

- (a) *Accident* - refers to an occurrence associated with the operation of a vessel or railway train that results in death, serious injury, or substantial damage to property or the environment.
- (b) *Emergency Preparedness and Safety Drills* – refer to mandatory safety briefings, evacuation procedures, and regular drills conducted by transport operators for crew and personnel to ensure readiness during accidents, fires, capsizing, derailments, collisions, or other emergencies.
- (c) *Incident* - refers to an occurrence, other than an accident, that affects or could affect the safety of maritime or railway operations and warrants investigation.
- (d) *Independent Authority* - refers to an organization that is functionally separate from transportation regulatory bodies, law enforcement agencies, prosecution authorities, and entities whose interests could conflict with the objective investigation of accidents.
- (e) *Maritime Accident* - includes but is not limited to vessel collisions, groundings, capsizing, sinkings, fires, explosions, loss of life at sea, and marine pollution incidents involving vessels operating in Philippine waters or vessels registered in the Philippines.
- (f) *Minimum Safety Equipment* – refers to safety devices and facilities required by law, rules, or international standards, including to life vests, life rafts, lifeboats, flotation devices, emergency exits, fire suppression systems, first-aid equipment, and emergency communication systems, in quantities sufficient for all passengers and crew on every trip.
- (g) *Overloading* – refers to the carriage of passengers, cargo, or equipment in excess of the maximum authorized capacity as certified by the appropriate regulatory authority or reflected in the vessel's or train's approved safety documentation.
- (h) *Railway* - refers to any system of rail-based transport, including heavy rail, light rail transit (LRT), metro rail transit (MRT), commuter rail, and other guided transport systems operating on fixed rails or guideways.
- (i) *Railway Accident* - includes but is not limited to train collisions, derailments, level crossing incidents, train fires, platform accidents, and incidents involving railway infrastructure or rolling stock that result in death, injury, or significant damage.
- (j) *Safety Investigation* - refers to a process conducted solely to determine the causes and contributing factors of an accident or incident for the purpose of preventing similar occurrences, and not for the purpose of apportioning blame or liability.
- (k) *Vessel* - refers to any watercraft, ship, boat, or other means of transport by water, including but not limited to passenger ships, cargo vessels, fishing vessels, recreational boats, and ferries.

SEC. 5. Independence from Regulatory and Enforcement Bodies. - The PTSA shall be functionally independent from

- i. Transportation regulatory agencies, including but not limited to the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), Philippine Coast Guard regulatory functions, Department of Transportation railway regulatory divisions, and Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA);
- ii. Law enforcement agencies, including the Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Coast Guard law enforcement functions, and Maritime Police;
- iii. Prosecution authorities at the national and local levels; and

- iv. Any entity whose commercial, operational, or institutional interests may conflict with the objective investigation of maritime or railway accidents, including vessel operators, shipping companies, railway operators, port authorities, and infrastructure owners.

The PTSA shall not be subject to direction or control by any regulatory, enforcement, or prosecution body in the conduct of its safety investigations. Personnel of the PTSA shall not hold concurrent positions in regulatory or enforcement agencies.

SEC. 6. *Mandate and Scope.* - The PTSA shall have authority to investigate transportation accidents and incidents involving maritime and railway transport. Such investigations shall be conducted solely to determine causes and contributing factors and to issue safety recommendations and shall not apportion fault or liability. Nothing in this Act shall preclude separate administrative, civil, or criminal proceedings conducted by appropriate authorities.

Findings of the PTSA establishing factual circumstances such as overloading, absence or insufficiency of required safety equipment, or failure to conduct emergency preparedness and safety drills may be used by appropriate regulatory, administrative, or judicial authorities as evidence, subject to existing laws and due process. Such findings shall not, by themselves, constitute a determination of criminal liability.

SEC. 7. *Governing Board.* - The PTSA shall be governed by a Board composed of five (5) Members, including a Chairperson, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Commission on Appointments.

Qualifications. Members of the Board shall possess the following qualifications:

1. Be a natural-born citizen of the Philippines;
2. Be at least thirty-five (35) years of age;
3. Possess a bachelor's degree in maritime studies, naval architecture, marine engineering, railway engineering, transportation management, mechanical engineering, law, or a related field;
4. Have at least ten (10) years of professional experience in maritime safety, railway safety, accident investigation, engineering, or related fields; and
5. Be of proven integrity and competence.

At least one (1) Member shall have demonstrated expertise in maritime safety, at least one (1) Member shall have demonstrated expertise in railway safety, at least one (1) Member shall have demonstrated expertise in accident investigation methodology, and at least one (1) Member shall have demonstrated expertise in systems engineering or human factors.

- (l) **Term of Office.** Members of the Board shall serve staggered terms of five (5) years, except that of the initial appointees, two (2) shall serve for three (3) years, one (1) shall serve for four (4) years, and two (2) shall serve for five (5) years, as determined by the President. Members may be reappointed for one additional term.

- (m) **Grounds for Removal.** A Member may be removed from office only for:

1. Conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude;
2. Gross misconduct or neglect of duty;

3. Incapacity to perform official functions for more than six (6) consecutive months;
4. Violation of ethical standards as defined in the Code of Conduct for the PTSA; or
5. Acceptance of any position, employment, or consultancy that creates a conflict of interest with the Member's duties under this Act.

Removal shall be by impeachment in accordance with the Constitution, or by the President upon recommendation of the Commission on Appointments based on any of the grounds stated above, after due notice and hearing.

SEC. 8. Powers and Functions. – The PTSA shall have the power and function to:

- a) Conduct independent safety investigations of maritime and railway accidents and incidents;
- b) Assume priority access and control over accident sites, including vessels, wrecks, railway tracks, trains, and related infrastructure, until such time as it is satisfied that all necessary evidence has been documented and preserved;
- c) Enter accident sites, examine and test wreckage, components, vessels, trains, railway infrastructure, and require the submission of relevant records, documents, equipment, voyage data recorders, event recorders, maintenance logs, crew qualifications, and other data from any person or entity involved in or having knowledge of the accident;
- d) Subpoena witnesses and documents, subject to due process, and compel attendance at hearings and the production of testimony and evidence necessary for the investigation, including testimony from vessel masters, ship owners, railway operators, crew members, passengers, and technical experts;
- e) Secure, preserve, and take custody of wreckage, vessels, railway rolling stock, components, materials, documents, electronic data, voyage data recorders, railway event recorders, and other evidence for purposes of analysis, testing, or retention;
- f) Conduct safety studies, trend analyses, and research into systemic safety issues in maritime and railway transport, including human factors, equipment failures, operational practices, and regulatory gaps;
- g) The PTSA document and expressly state in its investigation reports any findings of non-compliance with prescribed capacity limits, minimum safety equipment requirements, and emergency preparedness and safety drill obligations, for the guidance of regulatory and enforcement authorities and for purposes of preventing recurrence.
- h) Issue urgent safety recommendations to concerned agencies, vessel operators, shipping companies, railway operators, infrastructure managers, equipment manufacturers, and other relevant parties, and to recommend regulatory, policy, or operational changes to prevent recurrence of similar accidents;
- i) Publish investigation reports, safety alerts, marine safety bulletins, railway safety bulletins, and an annual transportation safety report summarizing findings, trends, and recommendations; and
- j) Cooperate and coordinate with international maritime safety organizations, railway safety bodies, and transportation safety agencies of other countries in accordance with international conventions and agreements, including the

International Maritime Organization (IMO) and relevant railway safety frameworks.

SEC. 9. *Priority at Accident Sites.* - Upon notification of a maritime or railway accident, the PTSA shall have priority access to the accident site. All agencies, including regulatory bodies, law enforcement, and emergency responders, shall coordinate with and provide full assistance to the PTSA. No wreckage, vessel, train, railway infrastructure, component, or evidence material to the safety investigation shall be moved, altered, or removed without authorization from the PTSA, except as necessary for rescue operations, public safety, prevention of environmental damage, removal of human remains, or clearance of navigation channels or railway lines for urgent operational reasons. The PTSA may delegate or share access to the site with regulatory or enforcement agencies, provided such access does not compromise the integrity of the safety investigation.

SEC. 10. *Amendment of Existing Laws.* - Existing laws granting transportation regulatory agencies authority to conduct safety accident investigations in maritime and railway sectors are hereby amended accordingly. The safety investigation functions of the Maritime Industry Authority under Presidential Decree No. 474 and related laws, the Philippine Coast Guard under Republic Act No. 9993 with respect to marine casualty investigations, and any railway regulatory bodies with accident investigation functions are hereby transferred to the Philippine Transport Safety Authority. Regulatory, supervisory, licensing, certification, and enforcement powers shall remain with the concerned agencies.

SEC. 11. *Transition Provisions.* - The PTSA shall be fully operational within twenty-four (24) months from the effectivity of this Act. During this transition period:

- a) All ongoing maritime and railway safety investigations being conducted by the Maritime Industry Authority, the Philippine Coast Guard, the Department of Transportation, and other agencies shall be transferred to and absorbed by the PTSA. The PTSA shall assume responsibility for completing such investigations and issuing final reports;
- b) The PTSA may continue to utilize the personnel, facilities, equipment, and resources of existing agencies on a temporary basis to ensure continuity of investigations;
- c) The Department of Transportation, in coordination with the Maritime Industry Authority, Philippine Coast Guard, and concerned agencies, shall facilitate the orderly transfer of maritime and railway accident investigation records, data, evidence, and archived case files to the PTSA; and
- d) A Transition Management Committee, composed of representatives from the Department of Transportation, the PTSA Board, and affected agencies, shall oversee the implementation of this transition and submit quarterly progress reports to Congress.

SEC. 12. *Cooperation of Agencies.* - All government agencies, including local government units, regulatory bodies, law enforcement authorities, the Philippine Coast Guard, port authorities, and maritime and railway operators, shall cooperate with and provide full assistance to the PTSA in the performance of its functions. Failure to cooperate, obstruction of an investigation, or interference with the preservation of evidence may result in administrative sanctions and criminal liability as provided by law.

SEC. 13. *Presumption of Negligence for Grave Safety Violations.* - When it is proven through competent evidence that a maritime or railway transport operator or company has:

- a) Operated a vessel or train while overloaded;
- b) Failed to provide the required minimum safety equipment sufficient for all passengers and crew for a particular trip; or
- c) Failed to conduct mandatory emergency preparedness and safety drills as required by law or regulation;

Such acts or omissions shall give rise to a prima facie presumption of negligence on the part of the transport or company.

This presumption shall apply in administrative, civil, and criminal proceedings, without prejudice to the presentation of contrary evidence, and shall be independent of the safety investigation conducted by the PTSA.

Nothing in this section shall be construed to diminish the constitutional presumption of innocence or to convert safety investigations into fault-finding proceedings.

SEC. 14. Appropriations. – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act, including organizational setup, infrastructure, specialized investigation equipment, vessel recovery capabilities, railway investigation tools, laboratory facilities, training programs, and staffing, shall be charged against available appropriations of the Department of Transportation. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued operation of the PTSA shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 15. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - The PTSA, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, Maritime Industry Authority, Philippine Coast Guard, and concerned regulatory agencies, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act within ninety (90) days from its effectivity.

SEC. 16. Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 17. Repealing Clause. – All laws, executive orders, rules, and regulations, or parts thereof, inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 18. Effectivity. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,