

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 7572



Introduced by Representative **FLORENCIO "JOEBEN" T. MIRAFLORES**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Province of Aklan, while a growth center in Western Visayas, continues to face significant digital infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural barangays that remain without reliable cellular or internet access. Of the nearly 58,000 public schools nationwide, fewer than 3,000 are connected to free government Wi-Fi, leaving many in geographically isolated areas, including in Aklan, unconnected.

While the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has installed 125 Free Wi-Fi sites in the province, this remains insufficient to cover all public facilities and communities. Nationally, about 40 percent of Filipinos still lack reliable internet access, according to the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028. In Aklan, officials reported that access to the DICT's public Wi-Fi program enabled the continuity of school operations, online consultations, claims processing, and emergency coordination even amid lockdowns.

The Aklan Smart Province Act seeks to close these gaps by mandating free, secure public Wi-Fi across government offices, schools, hospitals, ports, and barangay halls; streamlining the permitting process for cell sites and fiber networks; and building an integrated digital infrastructure for e-governance. It operationalizes national laws, including the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act, the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018, the Open Access in Data Transmission Act, and the E-Governance Act of 2025. With this bill, Aklan aims to be the first province with full barangay-level connectivity and integrated e-government systems, offering a scalable model for smart governance rooted in local initiative and supported by national frameworks.

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

HON. FLORENCIO "JOEBEN" T. MIRAFLORES
Representative, 2nd District of Aklan

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AN ACT

ESTABLISHING A POLICY AND FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM THE PROVINCE OF AKLAN INTO A SMART PROVINCE WITH PROVINCE-WIDE INTERNET CONNECTIVITY, STREAMLINED TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT, AND INTEGRATED DIGITAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR

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 “Aklan Smart Province Act.”

2 **Sec. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is the policy of the State to recognize the vital role
3 of information and communications technology (ICT) in nation-building and local
4 development. The State shall promote an environment that ensures universal access to reliable,
5 secure, and high-speed internet for all citizens, in line with the national objective of bridging
6 the digital divide. Toward this end, this Act seeks to:

7 (a) **Provide Free Internet Access in Public Places** - The Provincial Government of Aklan,
8 in partnership with national agencies, shall ensure free internet connectivity in all public
9 places in the province, including government offices, from the provincial capitol to
10 municipal and barangay halls, public schools, both elementary and high schools, state
11 universities and colleges (SUCs), Technical Education and Skills Development
12 Authority (TESDA) institutions, public libraries and parks, public hospitals and rural
13 health units, as well as airports, seaports, and transport terminals. No fee shall be
14 collected for use of these public Wi-Fi access points, consistent with Republic Act No.
15 10929, otherwise known as the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act. Internet
16 services provided under this program shall be fast and secure, meeting at least the
17 minimum standards set by the DICT.

18 (b) **Accelerate Telecommunications Infrastructure Development** - It is further declared
19 a policy to expedite the build-out of telecommunications facilities, such as, but not
20 limited to, cellular towers, fiber-optic networks, 5G small cells, satellite hubs, and

related infrastructure, to achieve full voice/data network coverage across Aklan. The State, through this Act, shall streamline permitting processes and remove unnecessary barriers to infrastructure investment, in line with existing laws and policies that encourage competition and openness in data transmission services. The goal is to make modern telecommunications services universally available, improve cellular coverage and signal quality in all barangays, and enhance the resiliency and capacity of networks in the province.

- (c) **Promote E-Governance and Integrated Digital Services** - This Act also affirms the commitment to the digital transformation of government services in Aklan. Consistent with Republic Act No. 12254, otherwise known as the E-Governance Act of 2025, which mandates all local government units to adopt online systems, the Province of Aklan shall establish a unified and secure digital platform for government operations. All provincial government departments and offices, and all component LGUs, are encouraged to interconnect their systems and databases, facilitating efficient data-sharing and public service delivery. This includes setting up a provincial government data center or cloud server that will host local e-government applications, and connecting to the national Integrated Government Network (IGN) for interoperability. The digitization of records, online processing of permits and documents, e-payment systems, and the use of digital signatures shall be pursued to increase government efficiency and transparency in Aklan.

Sec. 3. Aklan “Smart Province” Program and Coverage. – There is hereby established the Aklan Smart Province Program, to be led by the Provincial Government of Aklan in coordination with key national agencies. The Program shall consist of the following components:

- (a) **Free Public Wi-Fi Access** - Deployment of free Wi-Fi hotspots at all public places listed in Section 2, using both existing national programs and new initiatives. The coverage shall include all levels of government offices, including provincial, municipal, and barangay, public education institutions, such as DepEd schools, SUCs, TESDA centers, public health facilities, including provincial hospital, municipal health centers, super health centers, and barangay health stations, and other common areas such as public plazas, parks, markets, and transport hubs. The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) shall be the lead implementing agency for the Free Wi-Fi component, pursuant to the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act. The DICT, in coordination with the Provincial Government, shall develop a comprehensive plan for the rollout of access points, ensuring adequate bandwidth and cybersecurity measures are in place to protect users. Public internet access under this Program shall be truly free of charge and free from restrictive access arrangements, in accordance with the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act’s prohibition on exclusivity or unfair competition among service providers.
- (b) **Telecommunications Network Expansion** - A coordinated initiative to achieve 100% cellular network coverage, including voice, SMS, 4G/LTE, and 5G broadband, across all cities/municipalities and barangays of Aklan. The National Telecommunications

Commission (NTC), together with the DICT and the Provincial Government, shall identify underserved or unserved areas in Aklan and facilitate infrastructure development by public telecommunications entities (PTEs) or internet service providers. Telco companies shall be encouraged and incentivized to rapidly build new cell sites or base stations, upgrade existing towers, and lay down fiber-optic cables throughout the province. In line with Republic Act No. 12234, otherwise known as the Konektadong Pinoy Act, qualified providers of broadband and data services are no longer required to secure a legislative franchise to operate data transmission facilities. All network facilities and assets may be constructed and operated in Aklan through a simple registration or licensing process administered by the DICT/NTC, without the need for a congressional franchise, thereby lowering regulatory hurdles to new entrants. The Program shall promote infrastructure sharing and co-location. Priority shall be given to investments that extend coverage to remote and geographically isolated areas, as well as to schools and public institutions that lack connectivity.

- (c) **Integrated Government Digital Infrastructure** - Establishment of a province-wide government intranet and data management system. The Provincial Government, with technical assistance from DICT, shall set up a unified network connecting the provincial capitol, municipal halls, and other LGU offices, including a central data center or cloud service where government applications can be hosted. This will serve as a “single server” or interoperable platform for Aklan’s government transactions, records, and services. By connecting to the National Government’s Integrated Government Network (IGN), local offices in Aklan can securely communicate and exchange data with national agencies. The Program will also help each municipality and the province establish its e-government portals for online services, in compliance with the E-Governance Act’s requirement that every LGU implement an electronic service portal (eLGU system) within one year. Such portals will enable online applications for permits, licenses, civil documents, tax payments, and other services, reducing paperwork and in-person queues. All these digital initiatives must adhere to national ICT standards on cybersecurity, data privacy, and interoperability.

Sec. 4. Coordination of National Agencies and Local Government Units. – All relevant national government agencies (NGAs) are hereby mandated to coordinate and cooperate with the Provincial Government of Aklan in the implementation of this Act. In particular:

- (a) The DICT shall be the lead agency for the connectivity aspects of the Program, such as, but not limited to, free public Wi-Fi and broadband infrastructure, and shall coordinate planning, provide technical support, and align the Aklan Smart Province initiatives with the national ICT programs and the Philippine Digital Infrastructure Plan. The DICT’s Free Public Internet Access Fund and other funding mechanisms may be tapped to finance Wi-Fi hotspots and related infrastructure in Aklan. The DICT, through its regional offices, shall also assist Aklan in establishing the integrated government network and data center.

- (b) The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) shall facilitate coordination between the Province and the component municipalities/barangays. The DILG, in line with Section 14 of the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act, shall enjoin all LGUs in Aklan to streamline and simplify the processing of permits for telecommunication infrastructure and to standardize any local fees for such permits. Local government units must align their own free internet initiatives or digital programs with the Aklan Smart Province Program. They shall also designate appropriate focal persons or site coordinators for each public Wi-Fi site or infrastructure project to ensure smooth implementation. Crucially, LGUs are directed to facilitate access to government-owned lands or facilities for the installation of cell sites, antennae, fiber cables, and Wi-Fi equipment, and provide temporary storage or staging areas as needed for contractors. Security of installed equipment must be safeguarded by local authorities.
- (c) The NTC shall prioritize and expedite the assignment of frequencies, radio licenses, and certificates of public convenience and necessity (CPCNs) or other authorizations needed for telcos and internet service providers to operate in Aklan. Pursuant to Section 8 of the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act and the Konektadong Pinoy Act, the NTC must allocate any available spectrum or resources required for the Program without undue delay. The NTC shall also, within its mandate, monitor the quality of service (QoS) of both internet and cellular services in Aklan, ensuring that providers meet minimum standards, including, but not limited to, speed, latency, and uptime, as set in their licenses or in NTC Memoranda. Any complaints of poor service or coverage gaps should be addressed in coordination with the telcos and the provincial government.
- (d) Other national agencies are instructed to support the Program within their respective jurisdictions: e.g. the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for connectivity in public schools and SUCs; the Department of Health (DOH) for public hospitals and rural health units; the Department of Tourism (DOT) and Department of Transportation (DOTr) for connectivity in airports, seaports, and tourist areas; and so on. These agencies should coordinate with DICT and Aklan in providing any necessary resources or technical aid.

All NGAs and LGUs shall observe the Whole-of-Government approach in the rollout of the Smart Province initiatives. Consistent with Section 14 of the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act, national and local offices must work together to streamline the issuance of permits and avoid overlapping regulations. Whenever feasible, one-stop-shop arrangements or joint inspections should be employed for approving telecom infrastructure in order to cut red tape. National agencies, especially DICT and DILG, shall also help capacitate the Aklan LGUs to effectively maintain the new systems and comply with the requirements of e-governance and connectivity programs.

Sec. 5. Streamlined Permitting and Regulatory Support. – To hasten the expansion of ICT and telecom infrastructure in Aklan, all permitting processes and regulatory requirements shall be streamlined and time-bound in accordance with this Act and existing laws. The following shall be implemented:

- (a) **Single Unified Permitting Process** - The Province of Aklan, together with its component cities/municipalities and barangays, shall create a unified or coordinated system for processing all permits, clearances, and certificates needed by telecommunications companies, or their contractors, to build and operate infrastructure. This covers building permits, barangay clearances, excavation permits for laying fiber, tower site clearances, power connections, right-of-way permits, and other needed approvals. The aim is to allow applicants to file all requirements through a single window or portal, reducing the need to go to multiple offices. All concerned offices must act on these applications within the prescribed timeframes under Republic Act No. 11032, otherwise known as the Ease of Doing Business Act.
- (b) **Automatic Approval and Non-Additional Requirements** - Consistent with Section 15 of the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act and Ease of Doing Business Act, if a government office fails to process or release the permit within the maximum time allowed by law, the permit application shall be deemed automatically approved. Moreover, no agency or LGU in Aklan shall impose additional requirements, steps, or fees outside of those standardized by the DICT and national law. Once the DICT or the NTC has set the necessary clearances, local governments should not require redundant permits. Any local fees for tower or fiber installation must be reasonable and just to cover administrative costs only, as mandated by the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act. The Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) shall monitor compliance with these streamlined processes and may take action against officials or offices that unduly delay or hinder the issuance of permits, in line with the penalties provided by the Ease of Doing Business Act.
- (c) **Facilitation of Site Acquisition** - Government agencies and LGUs in Aklan are directed to assist telecommunications companies in identifying and securing sites for base stations or fiber routes. Provincial or municipal land, or rooftops of public buildings, should be made available, where appropriate, for lease or use as locations for towers and equipment, in accordance with law and subject to reasonable rental rates, standardized per DICT guidelines. When telco infrastructure must be placed on private property, local governments should help mediate agreements or right-of-way negotiations if needed, always respecting private property rights and following proper procurement or expropriation processes if applicable.

Through these measures, the time to build crucial digital infrastructure in Aklan should be greatly reduced. This will encourage providers to invest in more cell sites and broadband facilities at a faster rate and with greater convenience, ultimately leading to province-wide connectivity in the shortest possible time.

Sec. 6. Funding and Incentives. - The implementation of the Aklan Smart Province Act shall be funded through a combination of national appropriations, local funds, and public-private partnerships (PPPs):

- (a) **National Government Funding** - The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the budgets of relevant agencies. The DICT's budget

- 187 shall allocate funds to install public Wi-Fi in Aklan's target sites. The NTC's Spectrum
188 Users Fee-derived Free Public Internet Access Fund may also be utilized to finance Wi-
189 Fi hotspots and backhaul connectivity in Aklan. The Department of Budget and
190 Management (DBM) is hereby mandated to include in the General Appropriations Act
191 (GAA) the necessary funding to support the goals of this Act in Aklan, especially for
192 infrastructure in unserved areas. National agencies may program funds for connectivity
193 of their field offices or attached institutions in Aklan.
- 194 (b) **Local Government Funding** - The Provincial Government of Aklan shall allocate a
195 portion of its Annual Investment Plan and budget, and encourage its component LGUs
196 to do likewise, to fund complementary projects under this Act. This may include
197 procurement of networking equipment for government offices, maintenance of Wi-Fi
198 sites, development of local e-governance systems, and counterpart funding for tower
199 and fiber deployment, such as, but not limited to, right-of-way acquisition or site
200 development. LGUs are authorized to utilize their Special Development Funds or seek
201 financing to support ICT projects, provided such expenditures are in line with Republic
202 Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, as amended,
203 and applicable budgeting rules.
- 204 (c) **Public-Private Partnerships** - In pursuit of rapid and cost-effective implementation,
205 the Provincial Government is encouraged to enter into PPPs or joint ventures with
206 telecommunication companies and internet service providers. Consistent with Republic
207 Act No. 6957, as amended by Republic Act No. 7718, and Republic Act No. 11966,
208 also known as the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Code of the Philippines, Aklan may
209 solicit proposals for services such as province-wide broadband networks or city-wide
210 Wi-Fi mesh networks operated by private partners. All such partnerships must undergo
211 proper competitive selection or negotiation as required by law and ensure that
212 ownership of any assets can ultimately revert to the government if so stipulated.
- 213 (d) **Incentives for Private Sector** - To entice telecom and ICT companies to invest in
214 Aklan, all fiscal and non-fiscal incentives available under existing laws shall be made
215 available to qualified projects in the province. These may include income tax holidays,
216 exemption from value-added tax and customs duties for importation of equipment, and
217 other incentives as provided in Republic Act No. 11534, otherwise known as the
218 Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act and the
219 Omnibus Investment Code, especially if the project is registered as a qualifying
220 investment. The Board of Investments and/or the Fiscal Incentives Review Board
221 should classify telecommunications infrastructure projects in Aklan's underserved
222 areas as priority investments eligible for incentives. Additionally, under the Open
223 Access in Data Transmission Act's IRR, new entrants in the broadband sector enjoy
224 simplified licensing and are encouraged to enter – such entrants deploying in Aklan
225 shall be given expedited processing and regulatory support. Regulatory fees for permits,
226 tower fees, or spectrum usage in Aklan may be discounted or waived by the
227 government, where possible, to further encourage expansion.
- 228 (e) **Accountability of Funds** - All funds disbursed for this Act, whether national or local,
229 shall be subject to regular auditing and reporting. The Provincial Government shall
230 submit an annual report on the Program's implementation status, including a

breakdown of funds utilized from national allotments, local funds, and private investments, consistent with transparency and good governance practices. A Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on ICT or a relevant committee of Congress may monitor the progress of the Aklan Smart Province Program, ensuring that the funds are used efficiently to achieve the objectives of public connectivity and digital transformation.

Sec. 7. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). – Within 90 days from the effectivity of this Act, the DICT, in coordination with the Provincial Government of Aklan, DILG, NTC, and other concerned agencies, shall promulgate the necessary Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for the efficient and effective implementation of this Act. The IRR shall include detailed timelines, standards, and guidelines for each component of the Program, including specific targets, including, but not limited to, percentage of barangays with cell coverage, number of Wi-Fi sites to be activated per year, without prejudice to adjusting these targets as needed. The IRR will also clarify the roles and contributions of each stakeholder agency and the provincial and local governments. Importantly, the timeline for achieving full province-wide internet coverage and other deliverables shall be outlined in the IRR. The IRR shall be formulated with input from the telecom industry, academe, and civil society of Aklan to ensure that it is realistic and responsive to local needs. Once issued, the IRR must be published and widely disseminated in Aklan, including translation to local languages if necessary, and filed with the committees of jurisdiction in Congress.

Sec. 8. Penal Provisions. – Any public official or employee in the Province of Aklan or in any national agency who willfully delays, obstructs, or fails to act on an application for a permit, license, franchise, or any request pursuant to the implementation of this Act beyond the prescribed processing time without valid reason shall be subject to the penalties the Ease of Doing Business Act and other applicable laws. This includes administrative sanctions and possible criminal liability for violating anti-red tape provisions. Likewise, any person who abuses the free public Wi-Fi, including, but not limited to, using it for prohibited activities such as spreading pornography, as already prohibited by Free Internet Access in Public Places Act or who willfully damages ICT infrastructure installed under this Act shall face penalties under existing laws, such as Republic Act No. 10175, otherwise known as the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, for illegal activities online, or criminal laws on vandalism and destruction of public property. Telecommunication companies that participate in this Program are expected to meet their commitments on service availability and quality; failure to deliver basic standards of service, without force majeure or just cause, may result in NTC imposing fines or sanctions pursuant to Republic Act No. 7925, otherwise known as the Public Telecommunications Policy Act, and relevant regulations. The IRR may enumerate specific offenses and penalties to ensure compliance by all parties.

Sec. 9. Separability Clause. – If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

Sec. 10. Repealing Clause. – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly. Notably, this Act is intended to complement and bolster existing laws; any provision herein shall be interpreted in a manner that harmonizes with these laws and

275 leverages their strengths to achieve the objectives for Aklan. In case of conflict, the provisions
276 of this Act

277 **Sec. 11. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication
278 in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

279 *Approved,*