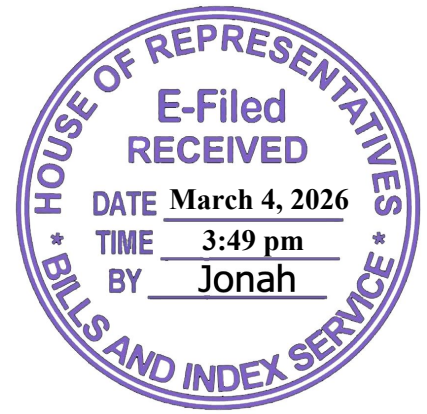


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Constitution Hills, Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 8287



Introduced by 2nd District of Iloilo Representative
HON. KATHRYN JOYCE F. GORRICETA, M.D.

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AUTISM AND
NEURODIVERSITY, PROVIDING FOR EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND
INTERVENTION, INCLUSIVE AND SPECIALIZED EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT
AND VOCATIONAL SUPPORT, COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES, COORDINATED
GOVERNANCE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution mandates the State to protect the rights and promote the welfare of persons with disabilities and to ensure their full participation in society. Republic Act No. 7277, as amended, and Republic Act No. 10754 provide the legal foundation for disability rights and benefits. However, for autistic and neurodivergent Filipinos—particularly children—implementation remains fragmented and uneven.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), in its 2020 Census of Population and Housing, reports that 8.7% of Filipinos aged five (5) years and over experience at least one domain of functional difficulty. UNICEF Philippines (2023–2024) estimates that approximately 1.6 million Filipino children live with disabilities. Conservative prevalence benchmarks further indicate that at least 1% of the population—over one million Filipinos—may be on the autism spectrum. Yet registry data from the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) as of February 2026 reflect only about 2.5 million registered persons with disabilities nationwide, without comprehensive national disaggregation for autism. The disparity between prevalence estimates and formal registration reflects substantial under-detection and uneven service access.

Early identification is not systematically integrated into primary healthcare nationwide. Diagnostic services remain concentrated in urban centers. Educational accommodations vary across schools and local government units. Structured transition pathways from education to employment remain limited. Many families shoulder high out-of-pocket therapy costs and long-term caregiving responsibilities with minimal inter-agency coordination.

The economic implications are measurable. Using conservative projections based on PSA 2024 wage data and labor force statistics, productivity losses associated with employment gaps among autistic adults and reduced workforce participation of caregivers may amount to approximately ₱50 to ₱60 billion annually, or roughly 0.2% of national GDP. This estimate excludes additional out-of-pocket household expenditures and long-term social protection

costs. Delayed diagnosis and fragmented services increase lifetime dependency and reduce economic participation.

The current fragmented system imposes a recurring and preventable economic burden. When services are uncoordinated, costs rise. When intervention is delayed, opportunity narrows. Families absorb expenses that structured systems could reduce, and the nation bears avoidable productivity losses.

This proposed measure establishes a *National Policy Framework on Autism and Neurodiversity* to align the Department of Health, Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Labor and Employment, TESDA, DSWD, LGUs, and the Philippine Statistics Authority under a coordinated life-course strategy. It strengthens and operationalizes the rights guaranteed under Republic Act No. 7277 and Republic Act No. 10754 through measurable standards, inter-agency accountability, and data-driven governance—without creating duplicative bureaucracy.

The measure is informed by structured international governance models, including the coordinated framework adopted by the Government of Dubai for Persons of Determination, adapting best-practice principles of inter-agency integration and centralized oversight to Philippine conditions. The use of the term “People of Determination” affirms dignity and capability while remaining fully consistent with existing disability law.

More than one million Filipinos may be on the autism spectrum. Over 1.6 million children live with disabilities. Billions of pesos in productivity are lost each year due to delayed detection and fragmented support.

This representation affirms that *coordinated governance reduces public costs*, while *early intervention strengthens lifetime outcomes and national productivity*.

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


KATHRYN JOYCE F. GORRICETA, M.D.
Representative
2nd District of Iloilo

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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 “Autism and Neurodiversity Empowerment Act.”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to recognize, respect, protect, and promote the rights, dignity, and full participation of autistic persons and other neurodivergent individuals in society. The State shall adopt a life-course, inclusive, and evidence-based approach that ensures access to early identification, appropriate education, meaningful employment, community-based support, and equal opportunities, consistent with Republic Act No. 7277, as amended, Republic Act No. 10754, and other relevant laws.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act:

- a) *Autism Spectrum Condition* refers to a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social communication, behavior, and sensory processing, manifested across a spectrum of strengths and support needs;
- b) *Neurodiversity* refers to the natural variation in neurological development, including but not limited to autism spectrum conditions and other neurodevelopmental differences;
- c) *Neurodivergent Individuals* refer to persons whose neurological development differs from prevailing norms and who may require specific support services;
- d) *People of Determination* refers to autistic persons and other neurodivergent individuals who are recognized as persons with disabilities under existing laws. The use of the term “People of Determination” in this Act is descriptive and policy-oriented and shall not create a new legal classification nor diminish, expand, or otherwise alter any rights, privileges, or entitlements provided under Republic Act No. 7277, Republic Act No. 10754, and related statutes; and
- e) *Early Intervention* refers to services provided during early childhood designed to address developmental delays and promote optimal cognitive, behavioral, and social development.

SEC. 4. National Policy Framework for Autism and Neurodiversity. – There is hereby established a National Policy Framework on Autism and Neurodiversity to ensure coordinated, efficient, and accountable service delivery for People of Determination across all stages of life.

The Framework shall harmonize programs, standards, and services among national government agencies and local government units (LGUs) and shall promote measurable performance targets and centralized monitoring.

SEC. 5. Early Identification, Diagnosis, and Intervention. –In order to promote timely developmental support for People of Determination, the Department of Health (DOH) shall integrate developmental and autism screening into maternal, newborn, and child health services, including primary care and barangay-level health programs.

Public health facilities shall be capacitated to conduct screening, referral, and early intervention services and priority access to intervention services shall be provided to indigent and financially disadvantaged families.

SEC. 6. Inclusive and Specialized Education. – To ensure equitable access to education for People of Determination:

- a) The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall ensure inclusive and specialized education responsive to neurodevelopmental needs;
- b) Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) shall be developed and implemented for learners who are People of Determination in public schools;
- c) Teacher education institutions shall integrate autism and neurodiversity competencies into training programs; and
- d) Structured transition planning programs shall be established to support People of Determination moving from education to employment or higher learning.

SEC. 7. Employment and Vocational Inclusion. – The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) shall develop autism-inclusive vocational training and employment pathways.

Employers shall provide reasonable accommodation consistent with Republic Act No. 7277 and other applicable labor laws; and supported employment, job coaching, and workplace transition mechanisms shall be promoted.

SEC. 8. Community-Based Support and Family Services. – Local government units, in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), shall integrate autism and neurodiversity considerations into local development plans and social protection programs for People of Determination.

Community-based services, caregiver education, and referral mechanisms shall be strengthened and public awareness initiatives shall promote understanding and inclusion of People of Determination.

SEC. 9. National Autism and Neurodiversity Council. – There is hereby created a National Autism and Neurodiversity Council to oversee implementation of this Act and advance the welfare of People of Determination.

The Council shall:

- a) Formulate a National Strategic Action Plan;
- b) Coordinate inter-agency implementation;
- c) Establish monitoring indicators; and
- d) Submit an annual report to Congress.

The Council shall be supported by existing personnel and resources and shall not create additional plantilla positions unless authorized in the General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. Data, Research, and Evidence-Based Policy. – In order to ensure evidence-based policymaking, effective service delivery, and informed resource allocation under this Act:

- a) The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), in coordination with concerned agencies, shall conduct periodic data collection on autism and neurodiversity prevalence and service access affecting People of Determination;
- b) Agencies shall maintain disaggregated data consistent with the Data Privacy Act; and
- c) A monitoring and evaluation framework shall guide policy improvements.

SEC. 11. Appropriations. – The funds necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the concerned agencies. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 12. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Health, in coordination with concerned agencies and stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for its effective implementation.

SEC. 13. 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. 14. Repealing Clause. – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 15. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,

Approved,