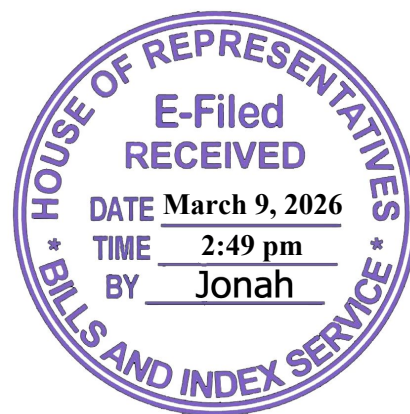


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 8364



Introduced by **ANG PROBINSYANO**
Party-List Representative Alfred Delos Santos

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution mandates the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Complementing this directive, Article XIV, Section 2(1) requires the establishment and maintenance of a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society, while Section 2(3) calls for the creation of scholarship programs for deserving students, particularly those from underprivileged sectors. These constitutional provisions underscore the State's duty to invest in specialized fields of education that directly contribute to national development and the effective administration of justice.

Consistent with this constitutional mandate, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued policies and standards under CHED Memorandum Order No. 048, series of 2012, establishing the Bachelor of Forensic Science program to strengthen the country's criminal justice education system. The CHED guidelines recognize the importance of forensic science in the administration of justice, particularly in the proper collection, preservation, and analysis of physical evidence in criminal investigations. Despite these efforts to develop forensic science education, the Philippines continues to face a critical shortage of trained forensic specialists, particularly in the field of forensic pathology, a discipline essential in determining the cause, manner, and circumstances of death in medico-legal investigations.

The urgency of strengthening the country's forensic pathology capacity has been repeatedly highlighted in recent years. During the 2022 Senate Committee on Justice hearings on unexplained deaths linked to illegal drugs, forensic experts emphasized the persistent lack of qualified forensic pathologists and the absence of a robust death investigation system capable of ensuring scientific and impartial determination of causes of death. The hearings underscored the need for greater investment in forensic training and specialization to support the rule of law, strengthen the criminal justice system, and ensure accountability in death investigations. These concerns

are further supported by reports from the Philippine National Police and medico-legal practitioners, which consistently point to the country's limited pool of specialists capable of conducting independent forensic examinations.

At present, the Philippines has only a very small number of physicians formally trained in forensic pathology, a situation that significantly constrains the country's capacity to conduct scientifically rigorous death investigations. Forensic pathology plays a crucial role in the justice system by providing objective, evidence-based findings that assist courts, prosecutors, and investigators in determining the truth. Without sufficient forensic expertise, criminal investigations risk relying heavily on testimonial evidence rather than scientifically verified physical evidence, thereby weakening the integrity of judicial processes and potentially affecting the rights of both victims and the accused.

This measure seeks to address this critical gap by establishing a scholarship program to support the training of future forensic pathologists. The proposed scholarship shall be available to: (1) qualified medical students who commit to pursuing specialization in forensic pathology; and (2) licensed physicians who intend to complete advanced training in the same field. By investing in the education and specialization of forensic pathologists, the State strengthens the country's capacity to conduct credible death investigations, improve criminal justice outcomes, and uphold the constitutional commitment to truth, accountability, and the rule of law.

This proposal complements existing policies under the Universal Health Care Act (Republic Act No. 11223) and existing CHED educational programs by focusing on capacity-building within a specialized field of medicine critical to national governance and justice administration. It does not conflict with existing laws but instead enhances the State's ability to meet its constitutional obligations in the fields of education, justice, and public service.

It is for the foregoing premises that the approval of this Bill is earnestly sought.


ALFRED C. DELOS SANTOS
Representative, Ang Probinsyano Party-List

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AN ACT
PROVIDING A COMPREHENSIVE, UNDERGRADUATE-TO-GRADUATE
STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDENTS TRAINING TO BECOME
FORENSIC PATHOLOGISTS

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Forensic Pathologists Scholarship Act.”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – In accordance with Article XIV, Sections 1 and 2(1) and (3) of the 1987 Constitution, which guarantee all citizens’ right to quality education that is relevant to the people’s and society’s needs, through the establishment and maintenance of a scholarship system, and in recognition of the Philippine criminal justice system’s urgent need for more forensic pathologists specializing in the proper recognition, collection, handling, preservation, documentation, and analysis of physical evidence, who can thus efficiently and reliably provide scientific and definitive information to courts of law, it is thereby declared State policy to pursue the development and institutionalization of scholarship grants for aspiring forensic pathologists.

The State shall support the graduate studies and skills training, from medical school to specialization, of deserving students who take up the forensic pathology track. Prioritization shall be given to those coming from financially challenged households, especially those based in rural or remote areas having no easy access to colleges and universities offering the requisite courses.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* – For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

- a. Forensic Science. – It is the application of scientific principles and techniques to the legal process in support of the proper administration of justice.
- b. Forensic Pathology. – This pertains to a specific field of forensic science, which involves the application of pathological methods in the investigation of a crime and sudden, suspicious, or unexplained deaths.
- c. Forensic Pathologist. – Also known as coroners, forensic pathologists are those who specialize in examining bodies...to determine the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding the cause of death.

They are therefore trained to:

- i. identify persons;
 - ii. correlate and/or reconstruct wounds, wound patterns, and sequences;
 - iii. perform autopsies to determine the presence or absence of disease, injury, or poisoning;
 - iv. evaluate historical and law-enforcement investigative information relating to the manner of death”; and
 - v. collect medical evidence, such as trace evidence and secretions, to document sexual assault.”
- d. Graduate Studies. – the graduate studies covered by this Act shall refer to the Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) professional degree program that students enter into upon taking and clearing the National Medical Admission Test (NMAT), under the “Updated Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Medical Education”, Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 10, series of 2016.
- e. Specialization Courses. – Given that forensic pathology requires medical doctors to have a working knowledge of toxicology, firearms examination (wound ballistics), trace evidence, forensic serology, and DNA technology and that forensic pathology is a subspecialty of pathology, the specialization courses covered by this Act shall refer, collectively, to the following studies/training undergone after completing the M.D. program: 1) the apprenticeship or residency in pathology, and 2) the additional one-year fellowship in forensic pathology.

SECTION 4. *Scholarship Grant for Graduate Studies.* – CHED, in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), shall establish a scholarship program for incoming medical students who are willing to commit to pursuing a specialization in forensic pathology. Scholarship grantees shall receive financial assistance for their tuition and book allowance.

Scholarship grantees who are from rural or remote areas, and who consequently have to secure lodging that is closer to their medical school/college, shall, in addition to the above aid, have their rent subsidized. On this matter, CHED shall coordinate with the concerned scholars' respective medical schools/colleges, as much as possible, subject to the availability of in-campus dormitories, to have the scholars boarded within the campus.

SECTION 5. *Scholarship Grant for Specialization Courses.* –

- a. Continuing Scholars. – Grantees of the graduate studies scholarship under Section 4 of this Act shall be entitled to a scholarship grant for specialization courses; *Provided*, That they meet the requirements under Section 7(B) and agree to all the conditions under Section 8(B).
- b. New Scholars. – The scholarship grant for specialization courses shall be open to all registered M.D.s in the Philippines and shall not be restricted to just those who were grantees of the graduate studies scholarship. Likewise, new scholars must meet the requirements under Section 7(B) and agree to all the conditions under Section 8(B).

SECTION 6. *Financial Support for Licensure Exam Review Expenses.* – CHED shall seek funding that will enable it to provide to the scholars under this Act an allowance that will help sustain them during their period of review for the following licensure exams:

- a. Philippine Physician Licensure Examination or the Philippine Medical Boards
- b. Medical Board Certification in Anatomic Pathology
- c. Medical Board Certification in Forensic Pathology

For this purpose, CHED is hereby authorized to set up a public-private project, whereby private donors are accepted as sponsors for scholars requesting financial aid for covering their licensure exam review expenses.

SECTION 7. *Qualifications.* –

- a. For Incoming Medical Students. –
 1. Must belong to the top fifty percent (50%) of their respective graduating classes;
 2. Must have already passed the NMAT and are in the process of enrolling into a medical school/college;
 3. Must have insufficient family and/or personal income for financing their education in the field of medicine; and
 4. Must have complied with other admission qualification/s imposed by the medical school/college being enrolled into.
- b. For Medical Doctors proceeding to Specialization Courses. – Both continuing scholars and new scholars under Section 5 of this Act:

1. Must belong to the top fifty percent (50%) of their respective graduating classes;
2. Must have already passed the Philippine Physician Licensure Examination and been formally registered as a Medical Doctor under the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC);
3. Must have insufficient family and/or personal income for financing their specialization in pathology, and then in forensic pathology; and
4. Must comply with any other admission qualification/s imposed by the university/school/college being enrolled into.

SECTION 8. Conditions. –

a. For Incoming Medical Students. –

1. The scholar shall pass the admission examinations and related requirements of the medical school/college that the scholar plans to enroll in;
2. The scholar shall carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the medical school/college and shall, under no circumstance, drop a course, resulting in underloading;
3. The scholar may be allowed, for valid reasons preventing his enrollment, to defer availing of the scholarship and to thus file a leave of absence for a period not exceeding one (1) school year;
4. The scholar shall receive and continue to enjoy the benefits of the scholarship until the completion of the course;
5. The scholar shall not delay taking the medical boards and, upon passing the same, can choose to:
 - a. Formally signify his/her intent to continue pursuing a specialization in forensic pathology by availing of a scholarship grant for specialization courses, and then go through CHED's advisement system, for orientation on which universities/schools/colleges he/she could potentially attend for specialization courses, based on the existing budget for this Act's implementation. The scholar can then notify CHED of his/her target university/school/college for taking up the specialization courses. From that point, the scholar can:
 - i. Immediately work on qualifying for admission to his/her target university/school/college; or
 - ii. Defer, for a period not exceeding one (1) school year, undertaking the process mentioned in Option (i); *Provided*, That deferment shall be subject to CHED approval.
 - b. Formally opt out of pursuing specialization as a forensic pathologist, in which case the student shall be contractually bound to either enter into the Doctors to the Barrios (DTTB)

Program or serve the provincial hospital of their province for at least ten (10) years.

If a particular province has no provincial hospital, then the governor shall nominate the government hospital where the scholar can serve.

If the scholar is the registered resident of a Highly Urbanized City (HUC) or an Independent Component City (ICC), then, CHED, in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH), can determine the province where the scholar can serve.

For those cases where the scholar, after passing the medical boards, is forced to opt out of pursuing specialization as a forensic pathologist due to disease, disability, or such other reasons as may be included in the list in the implementing rules, CHED, in coordination with the DOH, shall assist the scholar in getting into a paying job that he/she is still able to do and which will allow him/her to apply his/her medical training to public service.

b. For Medical Doctors proceeding to Specialization Courses. –

1. The continuing scholar and the new scholar shall pass the admission examinations and related requirements of the university/school/college that the scholar plans to enroll in;
2. The continuing scholar and the new scholar shall carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the university/school/college and shall, under no circumstance, drop a class, resulting in underloading;
3. The continuing scholar and the new scholar may be allowed, for valid reasons preventing his/her enrollment, to defer availing of the scholarship and to thus file a leave of absence for a period not exceeding one (1) school year;

If the continuing scholar had gone on deferment under Section 8(A)(5)(a)(ii), then CHED shall be stricter in its evaluation of whether the scholar may be allowed to once again postpone his/her education under this provision.

4. The continuing scholar and the new scholar shall receive and continue to enjoy the benefits of the scholarship until the completion of the courses;

Should a continuing scholar or a new scholar freely chooses to drop out of the specialization courses, he/she shall enter into the Doctors to the Barrios (DTTB) Program or serve the provincial hospital of their province. As to the latter option, the continuing scholar shall

be obligated to serve for at least ten (10) years, while the new scholar shall serve for at least five (5) years.

However, if the scholar in question, whether continuing or new, was only forced by a fortuitous event to drop out, and if the same happening renders him/her unable to enter into, or return to his/her previous form of medical practice, then CHED, in coordination with the DOH, shall, as in Section 8(A)(5)(b), aid him/her in finding gainful employment.

5. The continuing scholar and the new scholar shall not delay taking the medical board certification in anatomic pathology and forensic pathology and, upon passing both, shall be integrated into the public forensic pathology force under Section 9 of this Act.

SECTION 9. *Return Service.* – Continuing and new scholars shall join and render service as forensic pathologists with the appropriate rank and salary in the government, through the Department of Justice (DOJ), as soon as they receive their board certifications in anatomic pathology and forensic pathology.

They shall serve in the government for not less than the same period they have enjoyed the scholarship established under this Act.

SECTION 10. *Appropriations.* – Such amount as may be necessary to implement the provisions of this Act is hereby authorized to be appropriated from the National Treasury. Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continuous implementation of this Act shall be included in the CHED's annual appropriations.

SECTION 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days after this Act takes effect, the CHED, in consultation and coordination with appropriate government agencies, representatives from the private sector, and other stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 12. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions or parts unaffected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 13. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees or issuances, letters of instruction, administrative orders, rules, and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

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

Approved,