

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **8718**



Introduced by Representative LEILA M. DE LIMA

AN ACT
UPHOLDING AND PROMOTING CAMPUS JOURNALISM AND CAMPUS PRESS
FREEDOM, REPEALING FOR THE PURPOSE, REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7079,
ENTITLED "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION
OF CAMPUS JOURNALISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES," PENALIZING
VIOLATIONS AGAINST CAMPUS PRESS FREEDOM, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In the Philippines, the campus press has served as a bastion of democracy, preserving freedom of speech and expression inside and outside our nation's campuses.

Campus journalism is believed to have started in the country in 1890 when the University of Santo Tomas (UST) published *El Liliputiense* during the Spanish colonial period.¹ However, other historical accounts credit the start of the formal campus journalism to the publication of *The College Folio*, now *The Philippine Collegian*, by the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1910 during the American occupation.² In the Spanish, American, and Japanese occupations, campus journalists stood bravely against repressive conditions to expose the grave realities and abuses of the colonial governments.

During Martial Law under the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr., the State ordered the censorship and closure of major publications, television networks, and radio stations. In response, campus publications emerged and served as the alternative press – refuting State propaganda, exposing the excesses and injustices of the oppressive Marcos government, and reporting on the grim conditions to which Filipino people were subjected at the time. In fact, the first female and student activist to die in detention during Martial Law was a campus journalist named Lilia Hilao.³

¹ Valenzuela, J.Z. (1933). *History of journalism in the Philippine islands*.

² Matienzo, N.V., Manalo, O.S., & Monteloyola, V.V. (1985). *Ang Pamahayagan*.

³ Gavilan, J. (1 February 2018). Why campus journalists should go beyond classrooms. Rappler. Retrieved from <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/194941-campus-journalism-role-philippines/>.

Leading the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila's *Hasik* and penning critical essays, such as "The Vietnamization of the Philippines" and "Democracy is dead in the Philippines under Martial Law," Hilao was arrested, tortured, and eventually killed in 1973.

Student publications serve as tangible pieces of evidence of students' exercise of their Constitutionally-guaranteed rights to freedom of speech and expression and freedom of the press. Unlike the mainstream press, whose operations primarily depend on ad placements, student publications are collectively managed and financed by students.

As guardians of the truth and democracy, and in service of the interest of the students and the Filipino people, student publications cover a wide array of topics, such as the incessant and unabated tuition and other fee increases, repressive student policies, cases of abuse and sexual harassment within educational institutions, unfair labor practices of school administrations, human rights violations, disregard for national sovereignty, corruption in government, and various assaults to the rights of the people, among others.

Thus, student journalists often come into conflict with institutions who use their authority to quell free speech and expression and censor the free press. Throughout history, many student editors and writers have been persecuted. Incidents of harassment were particularly high during the 1960s to the 1980s when nationalist ideals were perceived as threats to the government.

Therefore, on July 5, 1991, Republic Act No. 7079, otherwise known as the Campus Journalism Act of 1991, was enacted with the aim to uphold and protect the freedom of the press at the campus level and to promote the development and growth of campus journalism. Unfortunately, despite the good intentions behind the crafting and passage of the law, Republic Act No. 7079 has been proven to be seriously flawed and riddled with deficiencies to fully maintain the existence of campus press, and to protect the rights and welfare of student journalists.

Among its glaring flaws are the following:

- 1) It legalizes the non-mandatory collection of the publication fee, the lifeblood of most student publications. It only provides a provision that enumerates the sources where the student publication funds may be taken.
- 2) It does not make it mandatory for all colleges and universities in the Philippines to establish student publications. Neither does the said law require that those student publications that remain closed until the present be reopened for the benefit of the students.
- 3) It does not contain a penalty clause, leaving erring administrations unscathed from violations. School administrations are able to commit offense after offense without suffering any consequence.

The aforementioned flaws and deficiencies in the law resulted in even more campus press freedom violations that have become even wilier and devious in form. Although information today is disseminated through more advanced and accessible

platforms like social media, student journalists continue to face the same challenges in harassment and censorship from the school administration and even red-tagging and surveillance from state forces like the NTF-ELCAC.

According to the College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP), the oldest intercollegiate alliance of student publications in the country, at least 206 cases of campus press freedom violations have been recorded from 2023 to 2024, including instances of administrative offices “meddling” with student papers’ coverage of campus issues.⁴ Among the systemic assaults faced by student publications are the following: (1) harassment of student writers and editors, (2) meddling with editorial policies, (3) actual censorship of editorial content, (4) withholding of publication funds, (5) non-collection of publication fee, (6) padlocking of the publication office, (7) closure of the student publication, (8) suspension and expulsion of student editors and writers, and (9) filing of libel charges against them.⁵

This bill seeks to repeal Republic Act No. 7079 and to provide remedy by undertaking various programs and projects aimed at empowering student journalists. In particular, the bill seeks to afford the student press with a consistent and reliable source of funds, provide them with in-depth training, and more importantly, bestow them with the freedom and protections to determine the content of their publication.

In the 17th and 18th Congresses, this Representation filed similar bills in the Senate. In the 20th Congress, a similar bill was filed by Representatives Renee Co and Antonio Tinio in the House of Representatives. This bill largely adopts this Representation’s SBN 1868 (17th Congress) and SBN 1524 (18th Congress), and Representatives Co and Tinio’s HBN 4172 (20th Congress).

For the strengthening of democracy and the promotion of free speech and expression, and the free press, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


LEILA M. DE LIMA

⁴ Segovia, L. (28 February 2025). “Pressed student press.” *The Guidon*. Retrieved from <https://theguidon.com/2025/02/pressed-student-press/>.

⁵ Pasion, C. (2011). “Laws and flaws: Juxtaposing RA 7079 and HB 4287.” *The National Guilder*, May-October 2011 Issue, Philippines.

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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 “*Campus Press*
2 *Freedom Act.*”
3

4 SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the declared policy of the State to promote
5 the development and growth of campus journalism as a means of encouraging critical
6 and creative thinking and as a beacon of nationalism and democracy inside and
7 outside the nation’s campuses.
8

9 The State also firmly recognizes the historic role and contribution of the campus
10 press to press freedom in the country, in providing a free and safe venue for the
11 discussion of student concerns, and in promoting social consciousness and defending
12 the interests and welfare of the Filipino people by tackling both national and sectoral
13 issues in its pages. The State acknowledges that the campus press, as part of the
14 media, is an important institution in a democratic society that promotes this
15 constitutionally guaranteed right to press freedom.
16

17 The education of the students shall be of paramount concern. Towards this end,
18 the State shall ensure that the practice of campus journalism shall neither interfere
19 with nor affect the regular schooling of the students, especially at elementary and
20 secondary levels.

1 The State thus resolves to undertake various programs and projects aimed at
2 improving the skills of student journalists, to promote responsible and free journalism,
3 to reopen all closed student publications, to establish student publications in schools
4 where there are none, and to protect and uphold freedom of the press at the campus
5 level and the rights of campus journalists at all times.

6
7 SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – For the purposes of this Act, the following are
8 hereby defined as follows:

- 9
- 10 a) “*Editor-in-Chief*” – the publication’s primary editor chosen through a
11 competitive and fair selection process. The process of selecting the
12 editor-in-chief shall be determined by the student body;
13
- 14 b) “*Editorial Board*” – a body composed of student journalists who have
15 qualified in placement examinations and shall be primarily in charge of
16 setting the tone of the paper in accordance with the thrust of the
17 publication. The editorial board may include a publication adviser at the
18 option of its members;
19
- 20 c) “*Editorial Policies*” – a set of guidelines by which a student publication is
21 operated and managed, taking into account pertinent laws as well as the
22 school administration’s reasonable policies. The said guidelines, which
23 shall be created and determined by the editorial board, shall determine
24 the frequency of the publication, the manner of selecting articles and
25 features, and other similar matters;
26
- 27 d) “*School*” – an institution for learning in the elementary, secondary, or
28 tertiary level composed of the student body, administration, faculty, and
29 non-faculty personnel;
30
- 31 e) “*Student*” – any person enrolled in elementary, secondary, post-
32 secondary, tertiary, graduate, and post-graduate levels, including those
33 enrolled in vocational and technical education;
34
- 35 f) “*Student Journalist*” – any *bona fide* student enrolled for the current
36 semester or term, who has passed or met the qualifications and
37 standards of the editorial board;
38
- 39 g) “*Student Publication*” – the issue of any printed and/or online material,
40 such as, but not limited to, newspapers, wall news, literary folios,
41 newsletters, and other similar forms, independently published by, and
42 which meets the needs and interests of, the students.
43

1 SEC. 4. *Student Publication.* – All educational institutions in the elementary,
2 secondary, and tertiary levels, public or private, shall be mandated to establish a
3 student publication. Every school shall have at least one (1) student publication without
4 prejudice to other publications established within the campus. A student publication
5 shall be published by the student body through an editorial board composed of
6 students selected through fair and competitive examinations and selection process.

7
8 All student publications whose operations ceased upon the directives of the
9 school administration shall be revived and allowed to operate again.

10
11 Once the publication is established or reopened, the editorial board shall freely
12 determine its editorial policies and manage the publication's funds.

13
14 SEC. 5. *Powers and Functions of the Editorial Board.* – The editorial board shall
15 have the power to select staff members of the publication, granted that the student
16 journalists the board selected are able to pass a qualifying examination.

17
18 The editorial board shall be primarily accountable and responsible for the
19 operation of the student publication and the management of its funds. At the end of
20 each semester or term, as the case may be, the editorial board shall prepare a report
21 on the disbursement of funds, subject to accounting and auditing rules. Such report
22 shall be posted at the school's bulletin board or published in the school publication.

23
24 SEC. 6. *Operations of Student Publications.* – The school administration shall
25 provide the student publication with an office, preferably located at the school's student
26 center, and other materials and equipment necessary for its operations.

27
28 SEC. 7. *Independence of Student Publications.* – The school publication shall
29 be free from any form of intervention from the school owners or administration,
30 advertisers, or donors with regard to the content of the articles the editorial board
31 chooses to publish, and the selection of its publication staff and members of the
32 editorial board. However, for elementary and secondary institutions, the school
33 administration may prevent the publication of materials that are libelous, oppressive,
34 or otherwise oppressive to generally accepted ethical standards of journalism.

35
36 The editorial board for higher educational institutions shall have full autonomy
37 on the handling of its funds, subject to audit from the school administration. For
38 elementary and secondary institutions, the faculty adviser shall be responsible for
39 preparing the budget and handling the funds along with the editorial board, likewise
40 subject to audit from the school administration.

41
42 The operation of the student publications shall not be delayed, suspended, or
43 closed down in connection with the articles it has published, or on the basis of the
44 conduct or performance of its staff, without due process of law.

1
2 SEC. 8. *Funding for Student Publications.* – Funding for the student publication
3 shall be sourced primarily from student publication fees collected by the school
4 administration. It shall be mandatory for the school administration to collect reasonable
5 student publication/subscription fees during the enrollment period.
6

7 For public schools, a publication fund shall be included in the budget of the
8 institutions.
9

10 Secondary sources of publication funds shall include the savings of the
11 respective school's appropriations and donations.
12

13 For this purpose, the number of *bona fide* students enrolled for the current
14 semester or term shall be used as basis for the amount of publication funds that shall
15 be released by the school administration who shall issue a list of the students enrolled
16 for the current semester or term to the editorial board.
17

18 SEC. 9. *Transmittal of Funds.* – The school administration shall effect the
19 automatic release of the student subscription fees to the student publication within
20 fifteen (15) days after the last day of enrollment, without need of request or demand
21 from the editorial board or any member of the student body. The publication funds
22 shall be deposited in a trust fund or in the account of the student publication in an
23 authorized depository bank.
24

25 In no instance shall the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical
26 Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and the Department of
27 Education (DepEd), as the case may be, or the school administration concerned,
28 withhold the release of funds intended for the student publication.
29

30 SEC. 10. *Publication Adviser.* – The editorial board of student publications in
31 higher educational institutions shall have the discretion to appoint a faculty adviser. In
32 case the student publication in a higher educational institution decides to appoint a
33 faculty adviser, the editorial board shall have the power to choose its faculty adviser,
34 whose functions shall be limited merely to technical assistance. The technical
35 assistance of the faculty adviser shall be limited to the sound practice of journalism.
36

37 However, the faculty adviser for elementary and secondary institutions shall be
38 mandatory. They shall ensure that the editorial board maintains proper journalistic
39 standards and that the publication funds are properly spent and accounted for.
40

41 SEC. 11. *Security of Tenure.* – A member of the publication staff shall maintain
42 their status as a student in order to retain membership in the publication staff. The
43 student journalist shall not be suspended, expelled, or punished with administrative

1 sanctions solely on the basis of the articles they have written, except when such
2 articles constitute a violation of the law.

3
4 SEC. 12. *Printing of the Student Publication.* – The printing of the student
5 publication shall be conducted by the editorial board and the student publication staff
6 through canvass or public bidding. For public schools, the student publication shall be
7 exempt from undergoing bidding process under Republic Act No. 12009, also known
8 as the *New Government Procurement Act*, with regard to the selection of a printing
9 press and the purchase of equipment and materials necessary for its operations. The
10 editorial board shall freely choose the printing press for the student publication.

11
12 SEC. 13. *Press Conferences and Training Seminars.* – The Commission on
13 Higher Education (CHED), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
14 (TESDA), and the Department of Education (DepEd), in partnership with the media
15 and campus press organizations and alliances, shall sponsor periodic competitions,
16 press conferences, and training seminars in which student editors/writers and teacher-
17 advisers of student publications in the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels shall
18 participate. Such competitions, conferences, and seminars shall be held at the
19 institutional, divisional, and regional levels, culminating with the holding of the annual
20 National School Press Conference for elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels in
21 places of historical and/or cultural interest in the country.

22
23 SEC. 14. *Power to Investigate.* – The CHED, TESDA, and DepEd, as the case
24 may be, shall be granted the power to investigate any violation of this Act and its
25 implementing rules and regulations.

26
27 SEC. 15. *Administrative Sanctions against Campus Press Freedom Violations.*
28 – The CHED, TESDA, and DepEd, as the case may be, shall impose administrative
29 sanctions for campus press freedom violations, including, but not limited to:

- 30
31 a) interrogation and intimidation of editors and staff members, and other
32 forms of harassment by the school administration, faculty members, and
33 the military, such as, but not limited to, sending of death threats, filing of
34 libel cases against student journalists, and the issuance of derogatory
35 and libelous public statements against student journalists;
36 b) meddling of school administration with editorial policies;
37 c) censorship of editorial content, or any other form of prior restraint on
38 lawful content;
39 d) withholding and non-collection of publication fees;
40 e) expulsion and suspension of student editors and writers without due
41 process;
42 f) stopping or suspending the operations of the school publication, such
43 as, but not limited to, the outright closure of the publication, locking of

- 1 the publication office, and cutting the electricity, water supplies, and
2 other utilities of the publication office;
3 g) non-establishment of at least one (1) campus publication for every
4 school;
5 h) refusal to reopen closed student publications; or
6 i) any other manner that commits any act to defeat any provision of this
7 Act.
8

9 SEC. 16. *Penalties.* – Any person who shall willfully interfere with, restrain, or
10 coerce any student publication/student journalist in the exercise of its/their functions
11 and rights guaranteed by this Act, or who shall in any other manner commit any act to
12 defeat any provision of this Act shall, upon conviction, be punished by a fine of not
13 less than One hundred fifty thousand pesos (P150,000.000) but not more than Two
14 hundred fifty thousand pesos (P250,000.00), or imprisonment of not less than one (1)
15 year but not more than five (5) years, or both at the discretion of the court.
16

17 If the offender is an educational institution or a juridical person, the penalty shall
18 be imposed upon the president, treasurer, secretary, or any other officer responsible
19 for the violation.
20

21 SEC. 17. *Legal Assistance to Campus Journalists.* – The CHED, TESDA, and
22 DepEd, as the case may be, shall provide legal assistance to student journalists in all
23 cases herein cited.
24

25 SEC. 18. *Reportorial Requirements.* – The CHED, TESDA, and DepEd shall
26 submit an annual report to both Houses of Congress on the status of the
27 implementation of the law, including violations thereof and the disposition of cases.
28

29 SEC. 19. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The CHED, TESDA, and
30 DepEd, in close consultation and coordination with student and campus press
31 organizations and all other concerned sectors, shall promulgate within sixty (60) days
32 from effectivity of this Act the rules and regulations necessary for its implementation.
33

34 SEC. 20. *Separability Clause.* – If any section or provision of this Act is declared
35 invalid or unconstitutional, the sections or provisions not affected thereby shall
36 continue to be in full force and effect.
37

38 SEC. 21. *Repealing Clause.* – Republic Act No. 7079, entitled “An Act Providing
39 for the Development and Promotion of Campus Journalism,” is hereby repealed.
40

41 All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, letters of instruction, rules and
42 regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby
43 repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.
44

1 SEC. 22. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its
2 publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the
3 Philippines.

Approved,