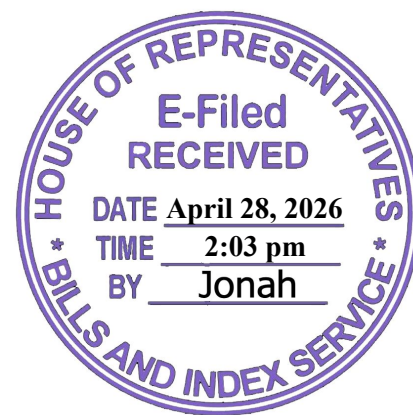


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 8974



Introduced by **Representative ERIC G. YAP**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to provide a legal scholarship to deserving and aspiring students who wish to pursue further legal education. It also mandates a two (2-) year return service program for the intended beneficiaries of said scholarship.

The Philippine Statistics Authority, in its 2024 Census of Population (POPCEN), indicates that the Philippines has a total population of one hundred twelve million, seven hundred twenty-nine, and four hundred eighty-four (112,729,484)¹. As of January 2024, the Roll of Attorneys listed ninety two thousand two hundred and fifty-nine (92,259) lawyers² since 1901. While five thousand five hundred and seventy two (5,572) new lawyers³ joined the ranks following the September 2025 Bar examinations, the current lawyer-to-client ratio remains approximately one (1) lawyer for every two thousand five hundred (2,500) Filipinos. This restricts the access of ordinary citizens to essential legal services.

The 2025 Bar examinations saw the highest applicant turnout in Philippine history, and highlights the earnest interest of many students in pursuing a legal profession. However, tuition fees in post graduate studies remain hefty, with tuition fees starting at One thousand five hundred pesos (P1,500.00) per unit in state universities and colleges, excluding living and review costs.

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority. 2024 *Census of Population (POPCEN) Population Counts Declared Official by the President*.
<https://psa.gov.ph/content/2024-census-population-popcen-population-counts-declared-official-president>

² Supreme Court Lawyers's List (<https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/lawyers-list-2/>)

³ Supreme Court of the Philippines. 7 February 2026. *5,572 New Lawyers Take Their Oath, Sign Roll of Attorneys*.
<https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/20260207-PR-Events-Bar-Oath-taking-Final-resize.pdf>

This proposed measure incentivizes the entry of aspiring and idealistic youth into the legal field, ensuring the sustainability of the public legal sector. In exchange, the mandatory return service program directs these new lawyers toward government service, reinforcing the ranks of the Public Attorney's Office and the National Prosecution Service, among others.

This vital piece of legislation fosters a sense of patriotism, promotes social justice for the marginalized, and ensures that the investment in legal education translates directly into public service.

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

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, sweeping strokes that form a cursive-like shape.

HON. ERIC G. YAP

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **8974**

Introduced by **Representative ERIC G. YAP**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE
PROGRAM FOR DESERVING STUDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING
FUNDS THEREFOR

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 “*Abogado Para sa Bayan Act*”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to uphold the right to free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and ensure that adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty. Towards this end, and in cognizance of the constitutional directive to provide for preventive measures and legal aid services to the underprivileged whose human rights have been violated or need protection, the State shall establish a legal scholarship and return service program to assist deserving students pursue legal education who shall eventually render legal services in government offices.

SEC. 3. *Legal Scholarship and Return Service Program.* – There shall be established a Legal Scholarship and Return Service (LSRS) Program for deserving students who intend to pursue a Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where there are no SUC offering Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree. The LSRS Program shall provide the following benefits to qualified legal education students:

- a. Free tuition and other school fees, including but not limited to student registration fees, library fees, and publication fees;

- b. Allowance for prescribed books and supplies;
- c. Allowance for review fees for government-mandated bar exams;
and
- d. Allowance for licensure fees.

SEC. 4. *Qualifications and Requirements.* – In order to qualify for the grant of scholarship under the LSRS Program, a prospective or current legal education student must satisfy the following requirements:

- a. Must be a Filipino Citizen residing in the Philippines;
- b. Must not have completed a Bachelor of Laws or Juris Doctor degree from any HEI offering legal education;
- c. Must be a graduating student or a graduate of an undergraduate degree program; and
- d. Must have passed the entrance examination and complied with other requirements for admission into the Juris Doctor or Bachelor of Laws degree program offered by the SUC or private HEI where the student intends to enroll.

SEC. 5. *Conditions for the Grant of Legal Scholarship.* – Qualified students accepted into the LSRS Program shall be subject to the following conditions:

- a. Must sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of the scholarship which shall be prescribed by the Legal Education Board (LEB);
- b. Must carry full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC or private HEI concerned, and shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which would result in underloading;
- c. Must finish the Juris Doctor degree program within the prescribed time frame of the SUC or private HEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies or private HEI concerned; *Provided*, That a scholar who is already enrolled, may be allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, to file a leave of absence;

d. Must take the bar examination at the first available schedule following the completion of the Juris Doctor degree, subject to the rules and guidelines set by the Supreme Court; and

e. Must render return service as provided under Section 7 of this Act.

SEC. 6. *Disqualifications.* – The scholarship grant shall terminate, and the recipient of legal scholarship shall repay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the LSRS program, in case of the following circumstances:

a. If the scholar fails to meet the academic requirements or to complete the course within the prescribed period without valid cause as may be determined by the SUC or private HEI concerned; and

b. If the scholar commits gross misconduct in a manner that would bring significant damage to the SUC or private HEI concerned or to the community as a whole.

SEC. 7. *Mandatory Return Service.* – Within five (5) years from admission to the practice of law, a scholar shall render mandatory return service for two (2) years in government agencies, including, but not limited to the Public Attorney's Office, National Prosecution Service, Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, Department of Justice, Department of National Defense, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Courts or in government agencies and instrumentalities that provide legal services to: (i) poor and marginalized individuals and communities; and (ii) public school teachers, public health workers, and military and uniformed personnel involved in cases arising from or in connection with the performance of their duties and functions:

The LEB, in coordination with the Civil Service Commission, shall ensure the placement of scholars in plantilla positions: *Provided*, That the mandatory return service shall be separate and distinct from the Clinical Legal Education Program as provided under Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court: *Provided, further*, That beneficiaries of the LSRS Program appointed to plantilla positions shall receive the appropriate salaries, benefits and other emoluments for services rendered under the mandatory return service; *Provided, furthermore*, That if a scholar, through no fault of their own, is not appointed to a government position within one (1) year from admission to the Bar, the return service obligation shall be deemed suspended; and if no position is offered within three (3) years, the scholar shall have the option to:

(i) have the obligation waived; or (ii) undertake an alternative compliance program to be formulated by the LEB pursuant to the provisions of this Act and RA No. 9999, otherwise known as the “*Free Legal Assistance Act of 2010*”: *Provided, finally,* That in the application of RA No. 9999, the allowable deduction from the gross income shall be the amount that could have been collected from the actual free legal services rendered or up to ten percent (10%) of the gross income derived from the actual performance of the legal profession, whichever is lower.

SEC. 8. *Number and Allocation of Students to be Admitted in the Program.* – Prior to the implementation of this Act and every five (5) years thereafter, the LEB shall, in consultation with Philippine Association of Law Schools and participating HEIs and upon the assessment of the shortage of legal practitioners in the public sector, determine the appropriate number and geographic allocation of scholars to be admitted in the LSRS Program.

SEC. 9. *Harmonization with the Clinical Legal Education Program.* – Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 5, subsection 5 of the Constitution, the LEB shall coordinate with the Supreme Court to ensure that the participation of scholars in the Clinical Legal Education Program (CLEP) under Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court is harmonized with the goals of this Act. The State shall respect the exclusive jurisdiction of the Supreme Court over the Law Student Practice Rule and Bar admission.

SEC. 10. *Sanctions.* – Any lawyer who has availed of the benefits under the LSRS Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service as provided under this Act shall be required to pay twice the amount of scholarship, including other benefits received by reason of participation in the LSRS Program: *Provided,* That the penalty imposed herein shall not apply to lawyers who fail to comply with the required return service by reason of force majeure or not due to their fault or negligence.

SEC. 11. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the LEB shall, in consultation with the Philippine Association of Law Schools, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, Commission on Higher Education, and the Supreme Court, promulgate the rules and regulations.

SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision 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 which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 15. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect immediately following its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.