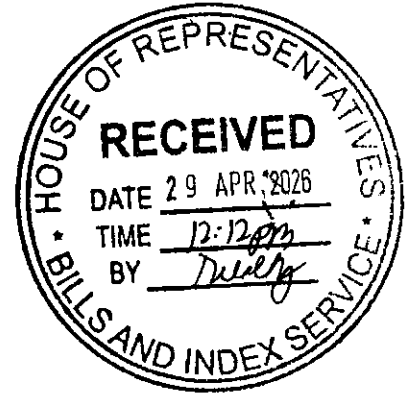


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **9007**



Introduced by HON. PHILIP CONRAD "DOK BONG" M. ACOP

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The proposed Act addresses a long-standing oversight in the Philippine healthcare and social justice systems. For decades, Filipinos on the autism spectrum have remained a marginalized sector, often invisible due to a lack of state-funded diagnostic facilities and specialized intervention programs.

This bill seeks to rectify this problem by institutionalizing a centralized authority, the Center for Autism, to transform neurodivergent individuals from dependent family members into self-reliant, contributing citizens. The Act is strategically designed to create a structured ecosystem for care, effectively shifting the paradigm away from the current, heavy reliance on expensive private clinics. At its core is a system of centralized governance through the National Autism Board under the Office of the President. This board is unique in its inclusive mandate, requiring representation not only from key government agencies like the DOH, DepEd, and DSWD, but also from the Autism Society of the Philippines and parents of individuals with autism, ensuring that national policy is directly informed by lived experience.

Complementing this oversight is a mandate for comprehensive service delivery that provides a "cradle-to-career" support system. This includes the establishment of diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitation clinics, with a specific focus on providing free services for indigent patients to ensure that poverty is no longer a barrier to developmental health. Furthermore, the Center is tasked with providing vocational training and creating employment avenues to support the transition of autistic individuals into adulthood.

To ensure long-term success, the bill institutionalizes early intervention through Section 6, which mandates nationwide screening for children under five years old via barangay health centers. This recognizes that early detection is the single most critical factor in improving developmental outcomes. Finally, the Act addresses the systemic shortage of local experts through a

robust capacity-building provision. By requiring the Center to provide continuing training for teachers, therapists, and medical professionals, the legislation ensures that the Philippine healthcare and educational workforce is adequately equipped to meet the growing needs of the autism community.

For the Philippines as a whole, this represents a vital economic and social investment. By defining “Disabled Workers” and “Disabled Gifted” individuals and providing them with vocational pathways, the State converts a demographic often pushed to the fringes into a productive workforce. This aligns the country with international human rights standards, recognizing that *neurological differences are a form of diversity rather than a condition to be hidden*.

This Act triggers a cultural shift by increasing public awareness to dismantle the stigma that leads to the isolation of autistic children. For those on the spectrum, the bill offers a transition from a life of perceived limitations to one of empowerment, granting them the legal right to Special Education (SPED) and sensory-friendly employment. Simultaneously, it provides a professional “North Star” for the medical community. Doctors and specialists will benefit from a centralized masterplan and standardized clinics to ground their research and practice, while the funding of regional training programs will help bridge the severe specialist gap in the provinces.

Ultimately, establishing a Center for Autism is a decisive step toward national progress. It acknowledges that while autism may be a lifelong developmental disability, it is not a lifelong sentence to marginalization. Through early detection, specialized education, and state-backed vocational support, the Philippines can ensure that every Filipino, regardless of neurological makeup, has the opportunity to achieve their highest possible level of functional ability and dignity.

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



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

SECTION 1. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby recognized that autism remains to be unknown in the Philippines because of the lack of government support. Until now, autistic individuals belong to the marginalized sectors of Philippine society, preventing their total rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance.

SEC. 2. Definition of Terms. - For purposes of this Act, the terms below shall be construed to mean, except where explicitly indicated or where the text clearly indicates otherwise as follows:

- a) *Autism* - is a developmental disability that appears during the first three years of life; the result of a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain; autism and its associated behaviors occur in approximately 1 of every 10,000 individuals;
- b) *Disability* - shall mean:
 - 1) Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more psychological, physiological or anatomical function of an individual or activities of such individual;
 - 2) Record of such an impairment; or
 - 3) Being regarded as having such an impairment;
- c) *Disabled Gifted* - persons who demonstrate superior performance capabilities in intellectual, creative, specific academic areas, leadership, or in the arts in spite of physical, sensory or psychological disabilities;

- d) *Disabled Worker* - means a worker whose earning capacity is impaired by mental, physical, or sensory deficiency or injury;
- e) *Handicap* - refers to a disadvantage for given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or prevents the function of activity, that is considered normal given the age and sex of the individual;
- f) *Impairment* - is any loss, diminution or aberration of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function;
- g) *Indigent patient* - a disabled person whose level of income falls below the poverty threshold;
- h) *Rehabilitation* - an integrated approach to physical, psychological, cultural, spiritual, educational, or vocational, measures that create conditions for individual to attain the highest possible level of functional ability; and,
- i) *Special Education (SPED)* - that type of education specifically designed for learners with special needs who cannot profit maximally from regular education such that they require trained personnel, modifications in the curricula, teaching methods, instructional materials and adaptations in facilities equipment.

SEC. 3. Creation of a Center for Autism. - There is hereby created a Center for Autism which shall be tasked to perform the following functions:

- a) Formulate and implement an integrated and comprehensive masterplan;
- b) Create a diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation clinic;
- c) Provide vocational training programs for autistic adults;
- d) Provide free diagnosis and rehabilitation services to indigent autistic;
- e) Provide avenues for employment opportunities for autistic individuals;
- f) Provide continuing training programs for teachers, therapists, medical;
- g) Provide other services such as counseling, orientation and referral;
- h) Increase public awareness and concern on autism by spearheading advocacy programs.

SEC. 4. Governing Board, Composition, Term, Functions. - There is hereby created a National Autism Board referred as to the Board, which shall

be under the Office of the President. The Board shall govern the Center for Autism and shall be composed of the following:

1. One (1) representative from the Department of Health, who shall sit as Chairperson;
2. One (1) representative from the Department of Education who shall sit as the Vice-Chairperson;
3. One (1) representative from the Department of Social Welfare and Development as Member;
4. Two (2) representatives from the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons as Members;
5. Two (2) representatives from the Autism Society of the Philippines as Members;
6. Two (2) representatives from the Parents of Children and Adults with Autism as Members.

SEC. 5. Secretariat. - The Board shall have a Secretariat under an Executive Officer who shall be appointed by the President. The Executive Officer shall manage the day-to-day operations of the Board and shall be assisted by a Deputy Executive Officer who shall likewise be appointed by the President. The Executive Officer shall have the following powers and functions:

1. Execute, administer and implement the policies and measures approved by the Board;
2. Direct and supervise the affairs and operations of the Board;
3. Submit within thirty (30) days after the close of every calendar year an annual report to the Board and such other reports it may require;
4. Submit an annual budget and such supplementary budgets as may be necessary to the Board for its consideration and approval;
5. Represent the Board in all transactions with other offices, agencies, instrumentalities of government and with all persons and other entities, public or private, domestic or foreign; and,
6. Appoint, subject to the confirmation of the Board, and discipline in accordance with Civil Service Laws, Rules and Regulations, the officers and personnel below the level of Deputy Executive Officer.

The Deputy Executive Officer shall perform the following functions:

1. Assist the Executive Officer in the discharge of his powers and functions;
2. Act as the Executive Officer during the Executive Officer's absence; and
3. Discharge such other powers and functions as may be required by the Executive Officer and the Board.

Sec. 6. Early Detection and Intervention Program. – the Center shall develop and implement nationwide early detection and intervention programs for children under five (5) years old. These shall include screening in barangay health centers, parent education, and there to improve developmental outcomes.

SEC. 7. Appropriations. – For the initial operating expenses of the Center, the amount of Five Million Pesos (5,000,000.00) is hereby appropriated from the available funds of the Office of the President. Thereafter, it shall submit to the Department of Budget and 6 Management, its proposed budget for inclusion in the General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 8. Transitory Provisions. – Within the period of one hundred and eighty (180) days after the approval of this Act, the Board constituted shall start its operation. All other government offices having functions similar to the Board shall then cease to perform such functions. Henceforth, these functions shall be deemed transferred to the Board.

SEC. 9. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – The Board in consultation with appropriate agencies from the private and government sectors, shall issue guidelines and prescribe rules and regulations within one hundred (120) days after the effectivity of this Act, which shall be published in two (2) newspapers of general circulation. A copy of such guidelines, rules and regulations shall be furnished the Congress of the Philippines.

SEC. 10. Repealing Clause. – All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations and other issuances, or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SEC. 11. Separability Clause. – Should any provision of this Act be declared invalid or unconstitutional, no other provisions hereof shall be affected thereby.

SEC. 12. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

Approved,