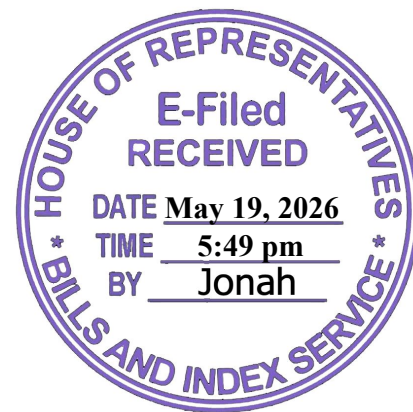


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **9340**



Introduced by **Rep. MANUEL “WOWO” L. FORTES, JR.**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, behavior, social interaction, and learning. As awareness and diagnosis of autism continue to increase, many Filipino individuals with autism and their families continue to face challenges in accessing early intervention, specialized healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and community support services.

The Constitution mandates the State to protect and promote the rights of all citizens to quality health services, education, and social development. It likewise recognizes the need to support vulnerable sectors and ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate fully and meaningfully in society. As such, there is a compelling duty on the part of the government to establish comprehensive and responsive mechanisms that address the unique needs of persons with autism throughout their lives.

Despite existing laws protecting persons with disabilities, gaps remain in the coordination and delivery of autism-related programs and services. Many families continue to experience limited access to diagnosis, therapy, specialized education, livelihood opportunities, and long-term support systems. There is likewise a need for stronger inter-agency coordination, research, awareness campaigns, and community-based interventions to ensure a more inclusive and supportive environment for persons with autism.

Therefore, this bill seeks to institutionalize a National Autism Care Plan that will strengthen early detection and intervention programs, improve access to healthcare and education, promote protection against discrimination, and establish a comprehensive framework for autism-related policies and services nationwide.

Ultimately, this bill aims to empower persons with autism to reach their full potential and become active and productive members of society while ensuring that their dignity, welfare, and rights are fully protected.

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


ATTY. MANUEL “WOWO” L. FORTES, JR.
Representative
Second District, Province of Sorsogon

Twentieth Congress of the
Republic of the Philippines
First Regular Session

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 9340

Introduced by **Rep. MANUEL “WOWO” L. FORTES, JR.**

**AN ACT INSTITUTING A PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AUTISM CARE PLAN FOR THE
SUPPORT OF PERSONS WITH AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

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

SEC. 1. Title. – This Act shall be known as the “National Autism Care Plan Act.”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights of all persons to full, healthy, and holistic development. As such, the State shall promote an environment conducive to the development of persons with autism (PWAs) to become socially accepted members of an inclusive society. Towards this end, the State commits itself to the establishment of institutional and social mechanisms to support PWAs throughout their lifetime, responsive to their needs, empowering and providing them with a quality of life.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- a. Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder – refers to a neurological condition characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, communication, as well as by unique strengths, as defined in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders;
- b. Diagnosis – refers to necessary assessments, including but not limited to neuro-psychological evaluations, genetic testing, MRIs, hearing tests, and psychometric tests to diagnose or discount autism or developmental disabilities in individuals;
- c. Intervention – refers to an interceding action undertaken to help improve the autism prognosis. Intervention in autism may take the form of medical, pharmacologic, therapeutic, educational, and non-traditional habilitative care; and
- d. Epidemiology – refers to the study and analysis of the distribution and determinants of health conditions, like autism, in defined populations.

SEC. 4. *Treatment as Persons with Disability.* – All PWAs shall be treated as persons with disability, as defined under Republic Act No. 7277, as amended. They shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and benefits provided for persons with disabilities under existing laws.

SEC. 5. *Continuing Education and Training on Autism for Public Service Providers.* – All officers and staff in charge of providing services to the public, including but not limited to the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Transportation (DOTr), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), Persons with Disabilities Affairs offices (PDAOs) at the Local Government Units (LGUs), Public Safety Units (military, police, firemen and other first responders), shall undergo mandatory continuing education to sensitize and empower service providers to become effective frontliners in the delivery of services to PWAs and their families.

SEC. 6. *Epidemiological Surveillance Programs.* – The DOH, in coordination with different academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, is hereby mandated to conduct an epidemiological survey to determine the prevalence of autism in the country annually to provide data to government agencies and the private sector, to make necessary services available to PWAs and their families.

SEC. 7. *Evidence-based Research.* – The DOH, the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), and the National Institute of Health (NIH) are mandated, in coordination with local and international educational institutions, to strengthen their research focus on autism; to invest in clinical and molecular studies and grants to support the development of best practices in autism intervention in the Philippines.

SEC. 8. *Early Detection and Intervention of Autism.* – The DOH, in coordination with the DepEd, is hereby mandated to establish a program for early screening and detection of autism, to provide the appropriate services to children and toddlers with developmental delays associated with autism, and to ensure the central PWD registry is updated accordingly.

SEC. 9. *Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage.* – All persons with autism shall be covered by the National Health Insurance Program of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PHIC). Funds necessary to ensure the enrollment of PWAs, who are currently covered under any existing category, shall be sourced from the National Health Insurance Fund of PHIC, earmarked from the proceeds of sin tax collections, as provided for in Republic Act No. 10351. It shall likewise include the cost of early screening and detection programs, as one of the available benefits of its members.

SEC. 10. *Protection Against Discrimination in Schools, Colleges, Universities, and Training Institutions.* – The DepEd, CHED, and TESDA shall formulate or update policies and protocols to ensure that all educational institutions are inclusive to learners with autism, in matters including, but not limited to, acceptance to academic or training programs, instructional supports, and behavior management.

SEC. 11. *Provision for Equal Opportunities for Employment.* – The DOLE and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall formulate policies and programs to ensure that adult PWAs are provided equal opportunities for gainful employment in the private and public sectors.

SEC. 12. *Protection against Discrimination in Insurance Coverage.* – The Department of Finance (DOF) shall formulate or update policies and protocols to ensure that all insurance providers shall provide PWAs access to life insurance instruments and shall include allied medical procedures (like occupational and speech therapies) in health insurance benefits of policyholders.

SEC. 13. *Protection in cases of Disasters and Emergencies.* – The DILG and the DND shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure that the military, public safety professionals, LGUs, and first responders shall provide the necessary life-saving support to PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges.

SEC. 14. *Access to Transportation.* – The DOTr shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges and their families are given reasonable accommodation in accessing all forms of transportation by service providers over land, sea, and air.

SEC. 15. *Reasonable Accommodation in cases of Legal Action.* – The DOJ shall formulate the necessary policies and protocols to ensure criminal justice agencies and professionals provide the necessary accommodations and protections to PWAs with behavioral and communication challenges, who may be accused of, victims of, or witnesses to crimes.

SEC. 16. *The Autism Council of the Philippines.* – There is hereby created the Autism Council of the Philippines (Council), under the Department of Health (DOH), which shall serve as an inter-agency and multi-sectoral mechanism to develop and implement a sustainable, long-term National Autism Care Plan.

The Council shall be responsible for:

- a. Developing and updating the National Autism Care Plan – a holistic roadmap in addressing the needs of Filipinos with autism and their families for the guidance of stakeholders in the private and public sectors; calibrated to meet changing needs of society and developments in technology;
- b. Designing campaigns that promote awareness of autism, and acceptance, accommodation, and appreciation of PWAs;
- c. Undertaking research and/or collaborating with private and public entities on research activities regarding autism in the Philippines;
- d. Improving the capabilities of the government to provide nationally available services that include diagnosis, early intervention, education, training, employment, and livelihood;
- e. Assisting the private and public sector in the design and delivery of appropriate programs for PWAs and their families;
- f. Developing capacity-building programs, incentives, and awards for PWAs in leadership, science, culture, arts, and sports;
- g. Networking with other organizations, institutions, and professionals working for the promotion of legislation and public programs for PWAs and

- h. Receiving donations and grants from international donor institutions, foundations, and multilateral and bilateral foreign donor agencies, involved in the transfer of knowledge or direct services for PWAs; and
- i. Provide grants to duly accredited non-government organizations involved in providing direct services to PWAs.

SEC. 17. *Composition of the Autism Council of the Philippines.* – The Council shall be composed of the following:

- a. The DOH Secretary as Chairperson;
- b. The DSWD Secretary as Vice-Chairperson;
- c. The DepEd Secretary as Member;
- d. The DILG Secretary as Member;
- e. The DOLE Secretary as Member;
- f. The NCDCA Executive Director as Member;
- g. The NIH Head as Member;
- h. The Philippine Information Agency (PIA) Head as Member;
- i. Three (3) representatives from the Philippine Association of Speech Pathologists and the Philippine Association of Occupational Therapists, as Members;
- j. Two (2) representatives from the Autism Society Philippines, as Members; and
- k. One (1) individual with autism, as a Member.

The members of the Council from the government agencies and institutions may designate their permanent representatives who shall have a rank not lower than an assistant secretary as their official representative in the meetings of the Council.

The six (6) appointive members of the Council shall be appointed by the President of the Philippines, from a list of five (5) nominees from each sector, who shall serve for a term of three (3) years, and renewable for another term; provided: the person appointed shall be of good moral character, of unquestionable integrity; with expertise and experience of at least six (6) years in the field of autism, service delivery and other related fields; and that in the event of a vacancy, the successor appointed to fill the same shall serve only the unexpired portion of the term the member he/she succeeds to.

The Council shall have a Secretariat which will coordinate the functions and organize the services as may be required by the Council in the exercise of its functions. It shall be headed by an Executive Director to be appointed by the Council.

All members of the Council shall receive emoluments as may be determined by the Council, in accordance with existing budget and accounting rules and regulations.

SEC. 18. *Programs and Services of the Autism Council of the Philippines.* – The Council shall design, implement, and deliver programs and services relevant to children and adults with autism and their families, under the following areas:

- a. Information campaigns;
- b. Research;
- c. Assessment, diagnosis, and intervention;
- d. Education, sports, and arts;
- e. PWA and family support;

- f. Employment and livelihood; and
- g. Residential and hospice care.

SEC. 19. *Meetings.* – The Council shall meet at least once a month upon a three-day notice signed by the Chairperson, or as often as necessary upon the written request signed by two-thirds (2/3) of its members. The presence of a majority of the members of the Council shall constitute a quorum in order for it to conduct its business.

SEC. 20. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within six (6) months from the date of effectivity of this act, the Council shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations to ensure that the above-mentioned government agencies can develop and implement necessary policies and protocols for service delivery to PWAs and their families.

The Council shall ensure the timely publication and dissemination of information of these guidelines and regulations in order to ensure that the various stakeholders in the welfare of PWAs are adequately informed.

SEC. 21. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included and incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the DOH.

SEC. 22. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 23. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, issuances, rules and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

SEC. 24. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,