



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

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session
HOUSE BILL NO. 9459



Introduced by Honorable Roger G. Mercado

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to make basic internet access a reality for every Filipino citizen, addressing the digital divide that hinders education, economic opportunities, and government service delivery. While Republic Act No. 10929 successfully established free Wi-Fi in public places, broader universal access is needed in a digital-first economy.

The proposed National Free Internet Program leverages public-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and infrastructure expansion to achieve nationwide coverage. It aligns with constitutional mandates on education, information access, and social justice, and supports broader goals like the Konektadong Pinoy initiatives for digital inclusion. Implementation will be phased, sustainable, and focused on equity, ensuring no Filipino is left behind in the digital age.

Therefore, passage of this bill is hereby being earnestly sought.

ROGER G. MERCADO



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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR UNIVERSAL FREE INTERNET ACCESS TO ALL FILIPINO
CITIZENS NATIONWIDE, ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL FREE INTERNET
PROGRAM, 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 "**Universal Free Internet Access Act of 2026**".

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to promote universal access to information and communications technology as a tool for nation-building, economic development, education, health, governance, and social inclusion. Recognizing the internet as an essential public service in the digital age, the State shall ensure that every Filipino citizen has affordable, reliable, and free basic internet access nationwide, with priority given to underserved, unserved, and geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). This Act builds upon and expands Republic Act No. 10929 (Free Internet Access in Public Places Act) by extending access beyond public places to individual citizens.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. — For purposes of this Act: a. Free Basic Internet Access refers to subsidized or government-funded internet connectivity providing a minimum speed of [e.g., 5-10 Mbps download] at no direct cost to citizens for essential uses such as education, government services, health information, and communication. b. Universal Service

and Access means the provision of internet services to all citizens regardless of location or income. c. Implementing Agency refers to the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), in coordination with the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DOH), and other relevant agencies.

d. Qualified Citizens means all Filipino citizens, with special subsidies or devices for low-income households, students, senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and residents of GIDAs.

SECTION 4. National Free Internet Program. — There is hereby established the National Free Internet Program (NFIP) under the DICT. The Program shall:

- a. Provide free basic internet access to all households, schools, barangay halls, public hospitals, libraries, and other public institutions nationwide;
- b. Partner with private telecommunications operators, local government units (LGUs), and community networks through subsidies, infrastructure sharing, and incentives to expand coverage;
- c. Deploy public Wi-Fi hotspots and community networks in unserved areas;
- d. Offer subsidized or zero-cost data packages for mobile users for essential government workers and educational services;
- e. Provide free or subsidized devices (e.g., basic smartphones or tablets) to indigent families through a needs-based program; and
- f. Ensure cybersecurity, data privacy, and digital literacy training as integral components.

SECTION 5. Implementation Plan. — Within six (6) months from the effectivity of this Act, the DICT shall formulate and submit to Congress a comprehensive five-year National Free Internet Roadmap. This shall include:

- A phased rollout prioritizing GIDAs, public schools, and low-income communities;
- Technical standards for minimum service quality;
- Mechanisms for public-private partnerships (PPPs);
- Monitoring and evaluation framework with annual reports to Congress.

SECTION 6. Funding. — The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations of the DICT and other concerned agencies under the General Appropriations Act (GAA). Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of the Program shall be included in the annual GAA. The DICT may also accept grants, donations, and other funding sources, subject to existing laws. A special trust fund may be established for this purpose.

SECTION 7. Incentives and Support to Private Sector. — Telecommunications and internet service providers participating in the Program shall be entitled to:

- Tax incentives, such as deductions or credits for infrastructure investments in unserved areas;
- Simplified permitting processes; and
- Access to government spectrum or infrastructure on preferential terms.
- Nothing in this Act shall prevent private entities from offering premium paid services.

SECTION 8. Safeguards. — a. Free access shall be limited to basic usage to ensure sustainability and prevent network abuse.

b. The NTC shall regulate quality of service and impose penalties for non-compliance by service providers.

c. All data collected shall comply with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

d. The Program shall promote net neutrality and open access principles.

SECTION 9. Separability Clause. — If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

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

SECTION 11. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,