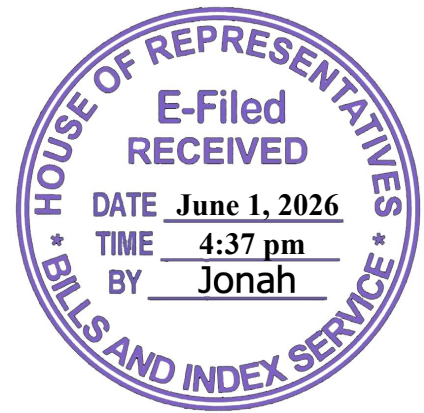


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **9604**



Introduced by Representative Richard I. Gomez, DPA

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Ponggay Sambajon, was a 24-year old pregnant and hearing-impaired young Filipina, who was studying at La Salle - St. Benilde, an institution which features the School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies (SDEAS) and the Benilde Deaf School (BDS). In April 2025, then seven (7) months pregnant, she found herself prematurely bleeding while attending an end-of-semester gathering held in the campus. She was initially taken by her colleagues to the campus clinic, but the clinic personnel recommended that she be brought to a hospital.

So, emergency responders were contacted and an ambulance arrived. However, what would have been a standard procedure for a medical emergency response team ended up being a complicated procedure due to the lack of medical personnel with training in Filipino Sign Language. The arduous and long-drawn emergency medical response experience resulted in Ponggay's placement in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), but not without the help of her relatives who intervened as interpreters between the patient and the medical crew. Without reliable interpreters of FSL, the medical staff would not have been able to properly address the emergency.

In 2018, Republic Act No. 11106 or "The Filipino Sign Language Act" was enacted to establish the Filipino Sign Language or FSL as the official sign language for the government in all transactions involving Filipinos who are hearing- and speech-impaired. Section 8 of the Act mandates that "*State hospitals and all health facilities shall take steps to ensure access of the Filipino deaf to health services, including the free provision of FSL interpreters and accessible materials upon request of deaf patients, or individuals who have family members who are deaf.*"

Ponggay's medical emergency, exposes a gap in RA No. 11106 that needs to be addressed in order for emergency responders of health, security, fire or disaster emergencies, to be able to communicate with hearing and speech impaired Filipinos, especially at the most critical moments.

The existing law does not accommodate highly stressful situations when there is no time to request for an FSL interpreter and life or death hangs in the balance.

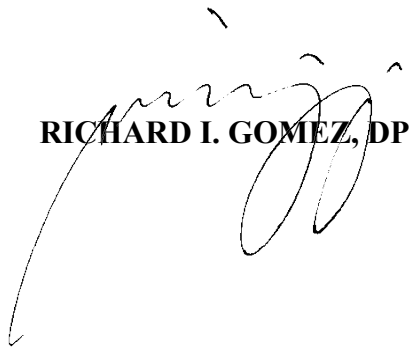
According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the estimated number of Filipinos with hearing difficulty stood at 1,784,690 in 2020. R.A. 11106 aligned our national laws with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aimed to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities.

Studies and reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) further show that persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected during emergencies due to barriers in communication, mobility, and access to services.

This bill introduces amendments to RA No. 11106 to include the following: (1) the formulation and formalization of a standard "Emergency FSL" that addresses the key emergencies, namely, medical, security, disaster, fire and security, (2) the institutionalization of "text message" in the 911 emergency response protocol, and (3) the requirement of all emergency responders to undergo a certified training for "Emergency FSL" prior to becoming an emergency responder. It must be noted that we are not requiring a full range of FSL communication skills but a targeted range of FSL skills to address specific questions and answers expected during emergency situations and rescue operations.

By removing FSL communication barriers, this measure promotes equal protection, inclusivity, and dignity, ensuring that no Filipino is left behind in times of crisis.

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



RICHARD I. GOMEZ, DPA

Republic of the Philippines
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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE "EMERGENCY FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE" (EFSL),
AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11106 OR THE "FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE
ACT", PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

SECTION 1. Section 7 of Republic Act No. 11106 or the Filipino Sign Language Act is hereby amended by adding a subsection, to read as follows:

"SECTION 7-A. *Formulation of Emergency Filipino Sign Language.* The KWF, together with professional sign linguistics and linguistics researchers, the CHED and the DepEd, in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH), the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Philippine National Police (PNP) and other relevant agencies shall formulate a standardized "Emergency Filipino Sign Language" (EFSL). The KWF shall establish a program for certification to signify proficiency and skill in practicing EFSL."

SEC. 2. Sec. 8 of RA 11106 is hereby amended by adding a subsection, to read as follows:

"SECTION . 8-A. *Emergency Filipino Language for all Emergency Responders.*
- All emergency responders managed by government agencies and private institutions shall

be required to undergo and complete a certification program for Emergency Filipino Sign Language (EFSL) prior to becoming a legitimate emergency responder.

SEC. 3. *911 Emergency Hotline for Hearing and Speech Impaired* . – The DILG shall institutionalize the inclusion of text messaging as a means to contact the "911 Emergency Hotline" to serve hearing and speech impaired Filipinos.

SEC. 4. *Implementing Rules and Regulations*. — Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the National Council in Disability Affairs (NCDA), in consultation with the KWF and other relevant agencies and stakeholders from the Deaf and Speech-Impaired community, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations

SEC. 5. *Appropriations*.– The initial funding for the implementation of this Act shall be taken from the current year's appropriations of the concerned agencies. Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. Relevant and allowable expenditures related to education may also be charged against the appropriations of the ECCD Council, the LGU Special Education Fund, or other relevant fund.

SEC. 6. *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 or modified accordingly.

SEC. 7. *Separability Clause*. — If any provision or part of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder of this Act shall not be affected thereby.

SEC. 8. *Effectivity Clause*. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or any newspaper of general circulation.

Adopted,