

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **9631**



Introduced by Representative **DIBU S. TUAN**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Access to basic education remains one of the most pressing challenges for thousands of Filipino learners living in remote, conflict-affected, and geographically isolated areas. While the Constitution guarantees the right of every citizen to quality and accessible education, reality shows that many learners in the countryside and upland communities still attend class in dilapidated rooms, walk for hours to get to the nearest school, or have to share classrooms across grade levels due to teacher shortages. In response to these structural inequities, the Department of Education launched the Last Mile Schools (LMS) Program in 2019 to target and uplift the most underserved schools in the country.

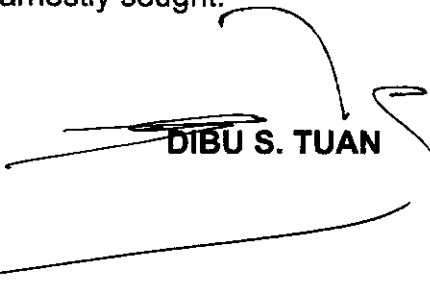
Under the Last Mile Schools (LMS) framework, identified schools are typically located in Geographically Isolated, Disadvantaged, and Conflict-Affected Areas (GIDCAs) and are characterized by limited classrooms, nonstandard or makeshift facilities, lack of electricity, minimal teaching staff, and small student populations often composed of Indigenous learners. These underserved schools, which have historically received minimal government support, totaled 9,225 as of 2019. The Department of Education estimates that at least P136 billion is needed to address critical gaps in infrastructure, personnel, and learning resources to meet equitable education standards.

The success of the LMS program has been evident in areas where interventions have already taken place. In Kalinga, the construction of LMS classrooms reduced dropout rates by over 30%, and in Sarangani, mobile teacher programs tied to LMS implementation have brought literacy and basic education to hundreds of children from the Blaan and Tboli communities who had never before attended school. In Samar, teachers report that children no longer have to walk three hours just to attend multi-grade classes, thanks to the completion of road networks under the LMS initiative.

Despite these milestones, the scale of the problem remains vast and cannot be addressed by executive programs alone. It is therefore imperative for Congress to institutionalize the LMS initiative through legislation that will ensure continuity, multi-agency collaboration, and sustainable financing. This bill seeks to establish public basic education schools in GIDCAs, build the access roads needed to reach them, and empower communities by weaving together infrastructure, education, and inclusive development.

By institutionalizing the LMS strategy into law, we commit to a more just and inclusive education system, one that recognizes that no child should be forgotten because they live in the margins. In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

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AN ACT

**ESTABLISHING PUBLIC BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN GEOGRAPHICALLY
ISOLATED AND DISADVANTAGED AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS,
PROVIDING ACCESS ROADS LEADING TO LAST MILE SCHOOLS, 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 "Last Mile Schools Act".

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is the declared policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.

The State recognizes and promotes the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities within the framework of national unity and development. To this end, the State shall recognize the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.

The State shall improve the quality and access to basic education of children in the far-flung, isolated, disadvantaged and conflict-affected areas, as well as those in Last Mile Schools, by investing on school infrastructures and roads leading to the said public schools.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. - As used in this Act:

(a) *Basic education* refers to the intended basic learning needs which provide the foundation on which subsequent learning can be based. It includes kindergarten, elementary and secondary education as well as alternative learning systems for out-of-school learners and those with special needs;

(b) *Basic Education School* refers to learning institutions accredited by the Department of Education (DepEd) to deliver services addressing the intended basic learning needs of students;

(c) *Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs)/Indigenous Peoples (IPs)* refer to the same definition stated in Section 3h, Chapter 2 of Republic Act No. 8371, or "The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997", which describes it as "group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCs/IPs shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains"; and

(d) *Last Mile Schools* refer to public basic education schools with gaps in resources and facilities which are located in geographically isolated and disadvantaged and conflict-affected areas (GIDCA).

SECTION 4. Establishment of Last Mile Schools. - The Last Mile Schools are hereby established, under the administration of the DepEd, to cater to the basic education of learners throughout the country's GIDCA.

The establishment of Last Mile Schools in locations situated by the ICCs shall be undertaken in consideration of the rights of the IPs, in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371.

SECTION 5. Access to Education. - The DepEd shall collaborate with concerned national government agencies for the delivery of the infrastructures necessary to ensure access to education in the Last Mile Schools, namely:

(a) Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), for the construction of access roads leading to the location of Last Mile Schools;

(b) Department of Energy (DOE) and National Electrification Administration (NEA), for the installation of electricity; and

(c) Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), for the installation of information and communications technology.

SECTION 6. Criteria. - The indicators used in identifying a public school to be included among the Last Mile Schools are the following:

- (a) Having less than four (4) classrooms;
- (b) With makeshift or nonstandard rooms;
- (c) Absence of or irregular electricity;
- (d) Have not been allocated funds for repairs or new construction projects in the last four (4) years unless destroyed;

- (e) With travel distance of more than one hour from the center of a city or municipality, or with difficulty of terrain or of such nature as to be considered having difficulty of access to existing educational institutions;
- (f) Having multigrade classes or rooms;
- (g) With less than five (5) teachers;
- (h) Having a student population of less than one hundred (100) learners;
- (i) With more than seventy-five percent (75%) IP learners; and
- (j) Having such other circumstances that make it difficult for learners to access school facilities.

SECTION 7. Implementation. - The school building program for the Last Mile Schools shall be established and completed within a period of five (5) years after the effectivity of this Act.

To facilitate synchronicity, harmony and complementarity of plans, resources and efforts of both the national government and the local government units (LGUs) towards the attainment of the objectives of this Act, the DepEd shall plan and implement the programs, projects, and activities that address the needs of the Last Mile Schools, in coordination and collaboration with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), DPWH, DICT, DOE, NEA, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), and concerned LGUs.

SECTION 8. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the budgets of the concerned Departments, agencies and Government-Owned and Controlled Corporations (GOCCs) in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 9. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the Secretary of Education shall, in consultation with the NCIP, DPWH, DOE, NEA, DSWD, DENR, NDRRMC, and Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, formulate the rules and regulations implementing the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 10. Separability Clause. - If any provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not so declared shall remain in force and effect.

SECTION 11. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, orders and rules and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SECTION 12. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation

Approved,