



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



House Bill No. 9679

Introduced by:
HON. KING GEORGE LEANDRO ANTONIO V. COLLANTES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines provides an unequivocal mandate: that the State shall promote social justice and give priority to the needs of the underprivileged, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, and the marginalized. The same living document affirms the dignity of every human and guarantees full respect for human rights, mandating Congress to give highest priority to enacting measures that protect our people by equitably distributing wealth and public resources for the common good.

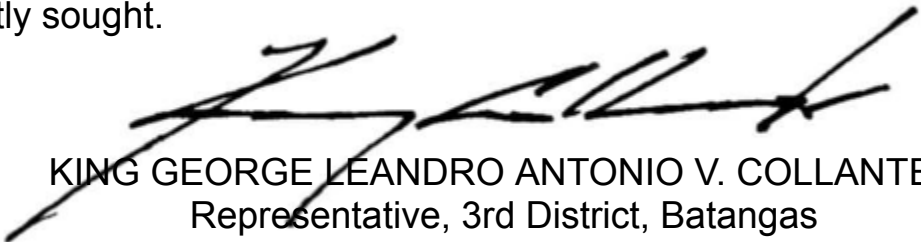
Children with disabilities represent among the most vulnerable members of Philippine society. Yet for too long, they and their families have navigated their daily realities without adequate government support, denied not by lack of law or rights but by absence of appropriate and accessible public programs. Recognizing the opportunity to help the families of children with disabilities, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) took the life-saving initiative by launching the Community-based Holistic Early Response and Intervention for Children with Disabilities, also known as Project CHERISH.

Project CHERISH provides financial assistance, therapy access, and rehabilitation support for children with disabilities and their families. Each participating family-beneficiary receives a monthly disability support package of up to Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000), covering basic needs, healthcare, therapy, and caregiver training. The program also provides a graduated monthly disability allowance ranging from Two Thousand Pesos (P2,000) to Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000) based on assessed need, to defray costs related to healthcare, therapy, education, and transportation.

Social justice is neither a slogan nor an abstraction but a concrete and operative directive requiring affirmative State action in favor of those who are disadvantaged. The institutionalization of Project CHERISH as a permanent national program is one such affirmative act aiming to transform a commendable program into an enduring public commitment, ensuring that benefits and beneficiaries are not contingent on budget cycles or administrative discretion but guaranteed by law.

A society that neglects its children with disabilities and the families who sacrifice daily to care for them falls short of its own highest ideals. The institutionalization of DSWD's Project CHERISH will ensure that the promise of an inclusive society is not merely dictated in law, but ultimately realized in homes, barangays, and communities across the nation.

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



KING GEORGE LEANDRO ANTONIO V. COLLANTES
Representative, 3rd District, Batangas



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HOUSE BILL NO. 9679

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AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING PROJECT CHERISH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT, 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 "Project CHERISH Institutionalization Act"

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. It is hereby declared the policy of the State to uphold the rights and promote the welfare of children with disabilities and their family caregivers. In consonance with the principles of the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (R.A. No. 7277), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the State shall establish and sustain a comprehensive, community-based disability support program that provides financial assistance, therapy access, rehabilitation support, and caregiver capacity-building. The State affirms that early intervention and inclusive community participation are critical to the holistic development of

children with disabilities, and that family caregivers are essential partners in realizing this mandate.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

- a) Child with Disability — a person below eighteen (18) years of age with a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society. This includes, but is not limited to, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and other developmental or congenital conditions requiring special care and support.
- b) Project CHERISH — the Community-based Holistic Early Response and Intervention for Children with Disabilities launched by the DSWD is herein institutionalized as a permanent national program.
- c) Monthly Disability Support Package — the comprehensive financial assistance provided to eligible beneficiary families, covering costs related to basic needs, healthcare, therapy, education, transportation, and other disability-related expenses.
- d) Family Caregiver — a non-professional individual, typically a parent, sibling, grandparent, or other household member, who provides primary and full-time care to a child with a disability.
- e) Rehabilitation Services — medical, physical, occupational, speech, and other therapeutic interventions aimed at improving the functional capacity and quality of life of children with disabilities.
- f) Community-based Intervention — programs and services delivered at the barangay, municipal, or city level that promote inclusion, reduce stigma, and support children with disabilities within their own communities.
- g) PRPWD — Philippine Registry for Persons with Disability, the national database maintained by the NCDA for profiling and tracking persons with disabilities and services rendered to them.

SEC. 4. *Establishment of the National CHERISH Program.* There is hereby established the National CHERISH Program under the administration of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in coordination with the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Education (DepEd), and Local Government Units (LGUs). The Program shall operate as a permanent, nationwide initiative modeled on the Project CHERISH pilot and shall provide the following core services:

- a) Monthly Disability Support Package ranging from Two Thousand Pesos (P2,000) to Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000) per beneficiary family per month, based on assessed need, household size, and regional cost-of-living.
- b) Access to Rehabilitation and Therapy Services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, behavioral intervention, and medical referrals to partner government hospitals and community health centers.
- c) Caregiver Capacity-Building, consisting of training and skills development programs for family caregivers on home-based care, disability management, therapeutic techniques, and livelihood opportunities compatible with caregiving.
- d) Community Engagement and Stigma Reduction, through awareness campaigns, inclusive barangay activities, and partnership with civil society organizations and faith-based communities.
- e) Data Management and Registry Integration, linking beneficiary data to Listahanan (National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction), the PRPWD, and other relevant national databases to ensure accurate targeting and efficient service delivery.

SEC. 5. *Eligibility and Coverage.* To qualify as a beneficiary under this Act, an applicant must satisfy the following criteria:

- 1. Child Beneficiary: The child must be a Filipino citizen below eighteen (18) years of age with a documented physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory disability certified by a licensed physician, developmental pediatrician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or the NCDA/PWDA.
- 2. Family Caregiver: The primary family caregiver must be a Filipino citizen who assumes full-time or primary caregiving

responsibilities for the child with disability, and as a result is unable to engage in full-time regular employment.

3. **Income Threshold:** The total household income of the beneficiary family must not exceed the current poverty threshold for the relevant household size as determined by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). The DSWD may adopt a needs-based scoring system to prioritize households in greatest need.
4. **Residency:** The beneficiary family must reside in a participating LGU or barangay duly enrolled in the National CHERISH Program.

The following categories of beneficiaries shall be presumed eligible upon compliance with documentary requirements: (a) solo parent caregivers of children with disabilities; (b) senior citizen grandparents serving as primary caregivers; (c) sibling caregivers aged eighteen (18) years or above who have foregone educational or employment opportunities to care for a child with disability; and (d) families with multiple children with disabilities.

SEC. 6. *Monthly Disability Support Package.* Eligible beneficiary families shall receive a Monthly Disability Support Package from the government to defray expenses related to the child's disability. The base amount shall range from Two Thousand Pesos (P2,000) to Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000) per family per month, to be determined by the DSWD according to the following principles:

- a) **Needs-Based Grading:** Families with greater care demands, lower income, or multiple children with disabilities shall receive higher support within the range.
- b) **Regional Differentiation:** The DSWD may adjust amounts by region or province to account for differences in the cost of living and the availability of therapy services.
- c) **Indexation:** Support levels shall be reviewed annually and adjusted at least every three (3) years in line with inflation and changes in the PSA poverty thresholds.
- d) **Duration:** The support package is intended as long-term assistance for as long as the caregiving situation persists. Eligibility shall be revalidated at least once every two (2) years.

The Monthly Disability Support Package shall be disbursed through safe and accessible channels such as ATM debit cards, cash transfer mechanisms, or electronic means. The package shall be tax-exempt and shall not be counted as taxable income. Receipt of this package shall not disqualify a beneficiary family from receiving other forms of government assistance for which they are otherwise eligible.

SEC 7. *Rehabilitation and Therapy Access.* The DOH, in coordination with the DSWD and partner LGUs, shall ensure that every beneficiary child has access to appropriate rehabilitation and therapy services. Specifically:

- a) Government hospitals, rural health units, and community health centers shall be directed to prioritize children enrolled in the National CHERISH Program for therapy sessions, medical consultations, and assistive device issuance.
- b) The DSWD may enter into memoranda of agreement with accredited private therapy centers, NGOs, and faith-based organizations to expand the availability and reach of rehabilitation services at subsidized or no cost to Program beneficiaries.
- c) Where physical access to therapy facilities is limited, the Program shall promote and fund home-based and community-based therapy delivery, including through trained community health workers and volunteer therapists.

SEC. 8. *Caregiver Support Services.* In addition to the Monthly Disability Support Package, family caregivers enrolled in the National CHERISH Program shall be entitled to the following support services:

- a) **Capacity-Building and Skills Training:** The DSWD, DOH, DepEd, and TESDA shall provide caregivers with training on home-based therapeutic care, disability management, autism-responsive parenting, and livelihood skills that can be pursued alongside caregiving duties.
- b) **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:** Recognizing the psychological toll of full-time caregiving, the DOH shall ensure access to free or subsidized counseling, peer support groups, and stress management programs for family caregivers.
- c) **Respite Care:** The DSWD shall facilitate access to temporary respite services — including trained in-home substitute

caregivers and community-based day care facilities — to allow primary caregivers periodic breaks from caregiving duties.

- d) PhilHealth Coverage: Family caregivers who are not otherwise covered shall be automatically enrolled as indirect contributors under PhilHealth, subsidized by the government.
- e) Social Security Continuity: The government shall establish a mechanism to subsidize SSS contributions of indigent caregivers who had to leave formal employment, so that caregiving years are credited as part of their social insurance record.

SEC. 9. National Registry and Data Management. The DSWD, in partnership with the NCDA and LGUs, shall establish and maintain a National CHERISH Registry that records all enrolled beneficiary families, profiles of children with disabilities, caregiving arrangements, services received, and outcomes tracked over time. This registry shall be:

- a) Linked to and interoperable with the PRPWD, Listahanan, and the PhilHealth member database;
- b) Protected in accordance with the Data Privacy Act (R.A. 10173), with personal identifiers secured and access limited to authorized personnel;
- c) Used for evidence-based policymaking, targeting of services, and evaluation of Program impact; and
- d) Coordinated with the PSA to include informal caregiving data in national time-use and disability surveys.

SEC 10. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting. The DSWD shall develop a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework for this Act. Key performance indicators shall include the number of children served, average support package received, therapy utilization rates, caregiver well-being measures, and developmental outcomes for children. The DSWD shall submit annual reports to Congress beginning one (1) year after effectivity. A comprehensive program review shall be conducted five (5) years after effectivity to assess impact and guide legislative enhancement.

SEC. 11. Grievance Redress and Complaints Mechanism. The DSWD shall establish a dedicated grievance redress system for the National CHERISH Program, providing clear channels for complaints and

appeals related to denial of eligibility, delayed payments, inadequate services, or misuse of funds. The mechanism shall be accessible via hotline, online portal, and DSWD regional offices; shall allow remote filing of complaints; and shall resolve grievances within thirty (30) days. Caregivers who file complaints in good faith shall be protected against retaliation.

SEC. 12. Appropriations. The funds necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against current appropriations of the DSWD and any available social program or contingency funds. Thereafter, the amounts necessary for the continuous operation of the National CHERISH Program shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act (GAA), with a dedicated budget line under the DSWD. The DOH, DepEd, TESDA, NCDA, PhilHealth, and relevant LGUs shall likewise allocate funds within their respective budgets to fulfill their mandates under this Act. The national government may provide financial incentives to LGUs that champion local CHERISH program implementation.

SEC. 13. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DSWD, as lead agency, in consultation with the DOH, NCDA, DepEd, TESDA, Department of Finance (DOF), Civil Service Commission (CSC), and representatives from advocacy groups for persons with disabilities, shall promulgate the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). The IRR shall detail eligibility criteria, documentary requirements, subsidy determination formulas, service delivery standards, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and timelines for phased implementation. The IRR shall be submitted to the Committees on Social Services of both Houses of Congress for review.

SEC 14. Harmonization with Existing Laws. This Act shall be read in harmony with R.A. No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities), R.A. No. 11861 (Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act), R.A. No. 11223 (Universal Health Care Act), R.A. No. 11036 (Mental Health Act), and House Bill No. 5088 (Family Caregiver Support and Welfare Act, if enacted). Where a beneficiary qualifies under multiple programs, the DSWD shall coordinate with concerned agencies to allow stacking of complementary benefits or to ensure that the beneficiary receives the more advantageous assistance, without unjust duplication. All laws, orders, and

issuances inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 15. *Separability Clause.* If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 16. *Effectivity.* This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,