

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

20th Congress
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 9700



Introduced by Rep. Maria Vanessa C. Aumentado

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Environmental health risks are a major but under-addressed driver of disease and premature death in the Philippines. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), air pollution causes approximately 7 million deaths globally each year. In the Philippines, ambient air pollution levels remain several times higher than the WHO guideline for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). Independent studies estimate that more than 60,000 premature deaths in the country in 2019 were attributable to air pollution alone, with economic losses reaching trillions of pesos equivalent to a significant percentage of national GDP.

Environmental risk factors contribute substantially to the national disease burden. Past assessments by the World Bank indicate that environmental factors account for roughly one-fifth of disease cases in the Philippines. Air pollution is strongly linked to stroke, ischemic heart disease, chronic respiratory illnesses, and lung cancer. Unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene continue to contribute to diarrheal diseases and other preventable illnesses.

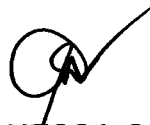
Despite these realities, there is currently no centralized bureau within the Department of Health dedicated exclusively to environmental health surveillance, regulation, and emergency response. Functions related to sanitation,

epidemiology, and environmental monitoring are fragmented across offices, resulting in limited integration of environmental exposure data with public health outcomes.

This bill seeks to address these structural and functional gaps by establishing the Environmental Health Bureau as the primary technical and regulatory authority within the DOH on environmental health matters. The Bureau will integrate environmental data with disease surveillance systems including toxicovigilance, develop science-based policies and standards, support local government units, and lead coordinated responses to environmental health emergencies.

The creation of the Environmental Health Bureau will strengthen the country's ability to help mitigate the triple planetary crisis, prevent exposome-associated non-communicable diseases, food and waterborne diseases, reduce avoidable healthcare costs, and protect communities from emerging environmental threats, including those driven by climate change. It ensures that environmental degradation is addressed not only as an ecological issue but as a direct and measurable public health concern.

In view of the significant public health concern and disease burden such as avertible morbidity, premature mortality and disability, and economic losses linked to environmental determinants of health, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



MARIA VANESSA C. AUMENTADO

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AN ACT
CREATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BUREAU UNDER THE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS,
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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 "Environmental Health Bureau Act."

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people by ensuring a safe, clean, and health-supportive environment. The State recognizes that environmental risks including exposure to air, water and soil pollution, hazardous waste, toxic chemicals, climate-related health impacts, sanitation deficiencies, nuclear energy and ionizing radiation, biotechnology and nanotechnology, and all other exposomes and emerging environmental threats directly affect public health and require a centralized, science-based regulatory authority within the Department of Health (DOH).

SEC. 3. Creation of the Environmental Health Bureau. There is hereby created an Environmental Health Bureau (hereinafter “the Bureau”) under the Department of Health (DOH).

SEC. 4. Primary Mandate of the Bureau. The Bureau shall serve as the national authority on environmental determinants of health. Its primary mandate is to protect public health by identifying, assessing, and regulating environmental hazards including biological, chemical, and physical factors—and to ensure that all national development policies are consistent with planetary health standards. It shall serve as the primary technical and regulatory arm of the DOH on environmental health concerns and shall operate under the direct supervision of the Secretary of Health.

SEC. 5. Core Roles of the Bureau.

1. Strategic Regulator: Acts as the primary "gatekeeper" for health safety in industrial, urban, and infrastructure projects.
2. Scientific Steward: Serves as the Single Source of Truth for environmental health data through advanced toxicovigilance and surveillance.
3. Policy Architect: Leads the integration of "Health in All Policies" (HiAP) across other government agencies (Energy, Transport, Environment, Agriculture, Housing, among others).
4. Emergency Responder: Provides technical leadership during environmental health emergencies (e.g., chemical spills, outbreaks linked to climate change, or toxic contamination).

SEC. 6. Key Functions of the Bureau.

1. Formulate, adopt, implement, enforce, monitor and evaluate policies, standards, rules and regulations to safeguard public health from environmental risks, in coordination with relevant partners;
2. Provide education, outreach, technical assistance, and community engagement to inform, empower, and involve the public, workers, and

communities in environmental determinants of health and health impacts of triple planetary crisis;

3. Maintain a digital, real-time Environmental Health Data Repository that correlates environmental pollutants (air, water, soil), health hazards, and emerging exposomes with clinical disease patterns;
4. Establish a 24/7 National Toxicovigilance Reporting System to monitor poisonings and chemical exposures;
5. Review and approve health impact assessments (HIAs) for all major infrastructure and industrial projects. A Health Impact Clearance (HIC) shall be a prerequisite for any environmental or building permit;
6. Integrate environmental health with occupational health protections where exposures overlap, supporting worker and community well-being;
7. Conduct or support research, data collection, evaluation, and quality improvement to advance environmental health practices; and
8. Assure a competent workforce through training, certification support, and multidisciplinary staffing (including environmental health specialists, toxicologists, epidemiologists, and others);

SEC. 7. Organizational Structure. The Bureau shall be headed by a Director IV and two Directors III with four Divisions under each Director III. The Secretary of Health may create additional units as necessary. The Centers for Health Development (CHDs) including BARMM shall have a dedicated office known as Environmental Health Division headed by a Division Chief.

SEC. 8. Human Resource Development. The Bureau shall implement a continuing program for training and professional development of its personnel in the fields of environmental health science, policy, and law. The Bureau shall also partner with academic institutions and international agencies for advanced capacity-building programs and scholarships in environmental health science, and law enforcement.

SEC. 9. Modernization of Facilities and Laboratories. The Bureau shall develop a modernization plan for laboratory equipment, digital infrastructure, and regional testing facilities, ensuring their accreditation and alignment with international standards.

SEC. 10. Mandatory Health Impact Assessment. The Bureau shall have the primary mandate to require, review, and approve a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for all development projects, programs, and policies classified as "Health-Sensitive" or "Environmentally Critical." No project identified under this category by the Bureau, in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), shall be granted an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) or allowed to proceed without a valid Health Impact Clearance (HIC) issued by the Bureau.

SEC. 11. National Toxicovigilance Reporting System. There is hereby established the National Toxicovigilance Reporting System (NTVRS), a centralized mandatory surveillance and monitoring framework under the Bureau, in close coordination with Toxicology Specialty Centers and National Poison Management and Control Center (NPMCC). The NTVRS shall serve as the primary repository for the systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of data regarding toxic exposures, chemical poisonings, and adverse health effects arising from hazardous substances. All public and private healthcare facilities, including but not limited to hospitals, BUCAS centers, and Rural Health Units (RHUs), shall be mandated to report all cases of suspected or confirmed poisoning—whether accidental, occupational, or environmental—to the NTVRS within twenty-four (24) hours of initial consultation or admission.

SEC. 12. National Environmental Health Data Repository (NEHDR). The NEHDR is hereby established under the Bureau to ensure evidence-based policymaking and rapid response to environmental health threats. It is designated as the Single Source of Truth for all national information related to environmental health, encompassing data on water quality, air and soil pollution, chemical safety,

climate-sensitive diseases, occupational hazards, exposomes, among others. An Inter-Agency Oversight Committee composed of the DOH, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is hereby mandated to ensure the seamless integration of cross-sectoral data. In cases of conflicting environmental health data between different agencies or local offices, the verified data contained within the NEHDR shall be the legally recognized evidence for judicial proceedings, policy formulation, and the declaration of public health emergencies.

SEC. 13. Carcinogenic Substances Notification. The Bureau and Food and Drug Administration shall lead in the development and biennial publication of the master list of carcinogenic substances from food, drugs, cosmetics and household/urban hazardous products, among others. The FDA shall require all products to include any carcinogenic ingredients or substances in their full ingredient listings. The product's particulars shall be easily legible, clearly comprehensible, and indelible.

SEC. 14. Environmental Health Advocacy. The EHB and Health Promotion Bureau shall closely coordinate and collaborate with stakeholders in the observance of the annual environmental health awareness and advocacy campaigns in order to (a) intensify environmental health awareness, (b) increase environmental health literacy, and (c) combat misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation about environmental health.

SEC. 15. Coverage of Magna Carta Benefits for Public Health Workers. Personnel of the EHB are “health workers” as defined in section 3 of R.A. 7305 and as such shall be entitled to full benefits and incentives under the Magna Carta for Public Health Workers.

SEC. 16. Tax Exemptions and Privileges. All donations, contributions, endowments, equipment, devices and supplies to be imported by the Bureau’s authorized entities or persons, for the actual use and benefit of the Bureau, shall

be exempt from income and gift taxes and the same shall be further deductible in full for the purpose of determining the maximum deductible amount under Section 30 of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended.

SEC. 17. Administrative Sanctions and Penalties. The Director of the Bureau or their authorized representative, is hereby granted quasi-judicial powers to conduct hearings, issue subpoenas, and adjudicate cases involving violations of environmental health standards, the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) requirements, and toxicovigilance reporting mandates.

The Bureau shall have the authority to issue an immediate Cease and Desist Order against any establishment, project, or activity found to be in imminent threat to public health. Such order shall be executory and shall remain in effect until the health hazard is mitigated to the satisfaction of the Bureau. Proponents who commence projects without an approved Health Impact Clearance (HIC) shall be fined a minimum of One Million Pesos (₱1,000,000.00) per day of operation. Healthcare facilities or industries that fail to report mandatory toxicovigilance data within the prescribed period shall face a fine of Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱500,000.00) per incident. Any person or entity found violating standards for air, water, or chemical safety shall be fined between One Hundred Thousand Pesos (₱100,000.00) and Five Million Pesos (₱5,000,000.00), depending on the severity of the health impact.

Graduated Penalties. The Bureau shall implement a graduated penalty system:

- First Offense: Notice of Violation (NOV) and a mandatory corrective action plan.
- Second Offense: Maximum fine and suspension of operations.
- Third Offense: Permanent closure, revocation of business permits, and inclusion in a "National Environmental Health Blacklist," disqualifying the entity from future government contracts.

Criminal Liability. Administrative fines shall be without prejudice to criminal prosecution under the Revised Penal Code or special laws. If the violation results in death or permanent disability of any person, the maximum penalty provided under the law shall be applied to the corporate officers or responsible personnel.

SEC. 18. Environmental Health Litigation Fund. All fines and penalties collected under this Act shall be remitted to a special account known as the Environmental Health Litigation and Remediation Fund. This fund shall be managed by the Bureau and used exclusively for:

1. **Medical Assistance:** For communities directly affected by the environmental violation.
2. **Environmental Remediation:** To restore the affected area to health-safe standards.
3. **Legal and Laboratory Costs:** To support the Bureau's technical and legal enforcement operations.

SEC. 19. Appropriations.

The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the DOH. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 20. Transitory Provisions.

A. Absorption of Personnel. All existing permanent personnel of the Environmental and Occupational Health Division shall be absorbed into the Bureau. They shall be given first preference in the filling of positions in the new staffing pattern, provided they meet the minimum Qualification Standards (QS) set by the Civil Service Commission.

B. No Diminution of Benefits. There shall be no diminution in rank, salary, or benefits of the absorbed personnel.

C. Grandfathering of Eligibility. Incumbents who have been performing environmental and occupational health functions for at least three (3) years but lack specific new technical certifications shall be given a grace period of two (2)

years to obtain such credentials, during which their employment status shall remain undisturbed.

SEC. 21. Implementing Rules and Regulations.

Within ninety (90) days from effectivity, the DOH shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations.

SEC. 22. Separability Clause.

If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions shall not be affected.

SEC. 23. Repealing Clause.

All laws and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 24. Effectivity.

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