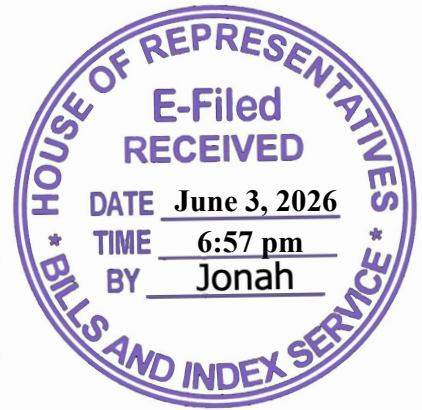


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 9786



Introduced by Representatives **JEFFREY SORIANO, JOCELYN P. TULFO,**
and **RALPH WENDEL P. TULFO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to institutionalize a National Autism Support and Development Center (NASDC) for Filipinos with autism and other developmental disabilities. While existing laws, including Republic Act (RA) No. 7277, otherwise known as the "*Magna Carta for Disabled Persons*", and RA No. 11650, otherwise known as "*Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act*", mandate the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, there remains a critical gap in integrated, specialized services that address the unique neurodevelopmental needs of individuals on the autism spectrum.

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that requires sustained and adaptive support across different stages of life. However, current programs remain narrowly focused on early childhood interventions, with limited structures for transition planning, adult services, independent living, and pathways to meaningful social and economic participation. Families are often compelled to navigate complex systems on their own, while specialized services remain limited and costly.

In light of this, the measure seeks to establish a comprehensive and coordinated national framework for autism support through the creation of a National Autism Support and Development Center under the Department of Health, supported by Regional Autism Resource Centers and strengthened inter-agency coordination. All in the pursuit to improve access to developmental screening and early intervention, diagnostic and therapeutic services, family support programs, inclusive education assistance, supported employment

initiatives, and independent living supports for persons with autism across the lifespan.

Through a more integrated support system, the measure seeks not only to expand services but to advance inclusion, uphold dignity, strengthen families, and support persons with autism in realizing their full potential as active members of society. In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


HON. JOCELYN P. TULFO


HON. JEFFREY SORIANO


HON. RALPH WENDEL P. TULFO

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House Bill No. **9786**

**Introduced by Representatives JEFFREY SORIANO, JOCELYN P. TULFO,
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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL AUTISM SUPPORT AND
DEVELOPMENT CENTER, CREATING REGIONAL AUTISM RESOURCE
CENTERS, STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION, HEALTH,
EDUCATIONAL, THERAPEUTIC, TRANSITION, AND FAMILY SUPPORT
SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM, 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 “*National Autism Support and Development Center Act*”.

SEC 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the state to protect and promote the rights and welfare of persons with autism and persons with other developmental disabilities, recognizing their dignity, autonomy, and full participation in society.

Consistent with Article II, Section 11 and Article XIII on social justice and human development of the Constitution, Republic Act (RA) No. 7277 otherwise known as the “*Magna Carta for Disabled Persons*”, as amended, RA 11650 or the “*Inclusive Education Act*”, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the State shall ensure accessible, inclusive, and responsive, and person-centered systems of support, including early identification and intervention, health and habilitative services, inclusive education, family support, skills development, independent living support, and pathways toward social and economic participation.

Toward this end, the State shall establish an integrated national framework for autism support through a coordinated system of specialized services, resource centers, and inter-agency collaboration.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

a. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in communication, social interaction, sensory processing, and patterns of behavior, with varying support needs.

b. Developmental disability refers to a severe and chronic condition attributable to mental and/or physical impairments manifested during the developmental period that may substantially affect independent functioning and may require lifelong or extended support;

c. Early Intervention Services refer to developmental, therapeutic, educational, family support, and related services designed to address developmental needs of infants and young children with autism or developmental disabilities;

d. Habilitative Services refer to services intended to help persons with autism attain, maintain, or improve functional, adaptive, social, educational, or vocational skills;

e. Family Support Services refer to counseling, parent education, caregiver training, respite support, referral assistance, and related services designed to strengthen family capacity;

f. Indigent Person with Autism refers to a person with autism whose family income falls below the poverty threshold as determined by the Philippine Statistics Authority or those identified as poor by the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR) of the DSWD;

g. Regional Autism Resource Center refers to a regional service and support center established or designated under this Act;

h. Person-Centered Care refers to services designed and delivered in a manner responsive to the needs, preferences, rights, and goals of the

individual.

i. Supported Employment refers to individualized assistance, workplace accommodations, job coaching, and related services enabling persons with autism to obtain, maintain, and advance in competitive or appropriate employment.

SEC. 4. Establishment of the National Autism Support and Developmental Center.

– There is hereby established under the Department of Health (DOH) a specialized national center to be known as the National Autism Support and Development Center (NASDC) which shall serve as the principal coordinating, technical, and specialized support institution for programs and services under this Act.

The NASDC shall operate in coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), local government units (LGUs) and relevant public and private stakeholders.

SEC. 5. Functions of the NASDC. – The NASDC shall have the following functions:

a. Formulate and implement a comprehensive national autism support and development framework;

b. Develop standards, protocols, and evidence-based guidelines for screening, assessment, intervention, habilitation, referral, and support services;

c. Establish and operate diagnostic, therapeutic, developmental, and support service programs;

d. Provide, directly or through coordinated referral networks, subsidized or free diagnostic, therapeutic, habilitative, and support services for indigent persons with autism;

e. Develop and support early identification and intervention programs integrated into primary health care and community-based systems;

f. Provide training and continuing capability-building programs for teachers, therapists, physicians, allied professionals, social workers,

caregivers, and community workers;

g. Support inclusive education transitions, independent living preparation, and employment pathways for adolescents and adults with autism;

h. Provide family support services, counseling, caregiver education, and referral assistance;

i. Conduct or support research, innovation, and pilot programs related to autism supports and developmental disabilities;

j. Maintain, subject to data privacy laws and ethical safeguards, a national autism information and research registry for policy and planning purposes;

k. Undertake public awareness and anti-stigma campaigns;

l. Provide technical assistance to regional centers and LGUs; and

m. Perform such other related functions necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

n. Develop standards and model programs for transition-to-adulthood and supported employment services;

o. Provide technical support for implementation of inclusive education and community-based habilitation models;

p. Develop a national monitoring and evaluation framework for autism-related programs and services.

SEC. 6. Regional Autism Resource Centers. – DOH, in coordination with relevant agencies, shall establish or designate Regional Autism Resource Centers in all administrative regions, subject to phased implementation and availability of funds.

These centers shall serve as hubs for:

1. diagnostic and referral services;

2. therapeutic and habilitative support;
3. training and technical assistance;
4. family support and respite services;
5. transition and employment support; and
6. community-based autism programs.

SEC. 7. *National Autism Advisory Council.* – There is hereby created a National Autism Advisory Council to provide policy advice, inter-agency coordination, and stakeholder participation in the implementation of this Act.

The Council shall be composed of:

1. One (1) representative from the DOH, who shall sit as Chairperson;
2. One (1) representative from the DepEd who shall sit as the Vice Chairperson;
3. One (1) representative from the DSWD as Member;
4. One (1) representative from the DOLE as Member;
5. Executive Director of the NCDAs, as Member;
6. Two (2) representatives from the Autism Society of the Philippines as Members;
7. Two (2) representatives from the Parents of Children and Adults with Autism as Members; and
8. One (1) representative from the allied therapy professions.

Representatives from the private sector and civil society shall serve for a term of three (3) years, renewable once.

The Council shall meet at least quarterly and may constitute technical working groups as necessary.

The Council shall assist in policy coordination, implementation review, and monitoring of this Act.

SEC. 8. *Executive Director and Secretariat.* – The NASDC shall be headed by an Executive Director appointed in accordance with civil service laws, rules, and merit-based standards.

No person shall be appointed Executive Director unless such person possesses recognized competence and at least five (5) years of relevant experience in developmental disability, public health, education, rehabilitation, social services, or related fields.

The Executive Director shall:

- a. Administer and implement the programs and policies of the NASDC;
- b. Supervise personnel and operations;
- c. Prepare strategic plans, budgets, and annual reports;
- d. Coordinate with government agencies, LGUs, and partner institutions;
- e. Oversee implementation of regional centers; and
- f. Exercise such other powers necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

A Secretariat and such technical and administrative personnel as may be necessary shall support the NASDC.

SEC. 9. *Early Identification and Intervention.* – DOH, through primary health care facilities, government hospitals, and community health systems, shall strengthen developmental surveillance, screening, referral pathways, and timely intervention services for infants and children at risk of developmental disabilities. Protocols developed under this section shall, where feasible, be integrated into existing child health and primary care systems.

SEC. 10. *Inclusive Education and Transition Support.* – DepEd, in coordination with the NASDC and relevant agencies, shall strengthen educational support, transition planning, and appropriate accommodations for learners with autism consistent with existing inclusive education laws and policies.

Programs supporting post-secondary transition, vocational preparation, and supported employment pathways, and adult life planning may likewise be developed in coordination with appropriate agencies.

SEC. 11. *Local Government Participation.* – LGUs shall endeavor, consistent with local autonomy and available resources, to establish or support local autism programs, resource hubs, and community-based services consistent with this Act. The NASDC shall provide technical assistance to LGUs to integrate autism-specific services into their respective Persons with Disability Affairs Offices.

SEC. 12. *Employment and Adult Support Services.* – DOLE, DSWD, the Technical Education And Skills Development Authority, and other relevant agencies, in coordination with the NASDC, shall support the development of programs promoting skills development, supported employment, livelihood opportunities, and independent living assistance for adolescents and adults with autism.

SEC. 13. *Coordination with Existing Laws and Programs.* – Implementation of this Act shall be harmonized, where applicable, with RA 7277, as amended; RA 11650; RA 11228; RA 11036 where relevant; RA 7610, where child protection concerns arise; and other related laws, policies, and issuances on disability rights, health, education, and social protection.

SEC. 14. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the DOH. Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continued operation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

The NASDC may receive grants, donations, endowments, and other lawful contributions from domestic or foreign sources, subject to existing auditing, budgeting, and accountability laws.

SEC. 15. *Transitory Provisions.* – Within the period of one hundred eighty (180) days after the approval of this Act, the Advisory Council shall be organized and the initial implementation framework shall be adopted.

Existing mandates of agencies shall remain, and functions under this Act shall be exercised in coordination therewith.

SEC. 16. *Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).* – Within ninety (90) days from effectivity of this Act, the Department of Health, in coordination with the

Advisory Council and relevant stakeholders, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations. A copy of such guidelines, rules and regulations shall be furnished to the Congress of the Philippines.

SEC. 17. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations and other issuances, or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SEC. 18. *Separability Clause.* – Should any provision of this Act be declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions of this Act which are not affected hereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SEC. 19. *Effectivity.* – This act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

Approved,