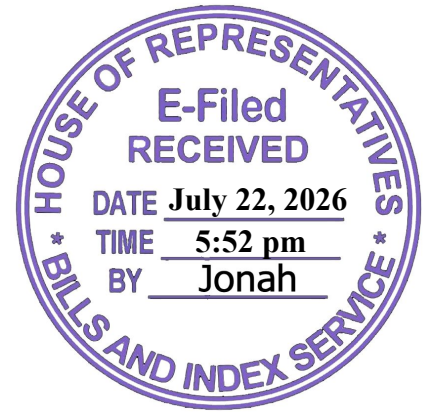




Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

Twentieth Congress
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10198



Introduced by Representatives Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, Yedda Marie K. Romualdez, Andrew Julian K. Romualdez and Jude A. Acidre

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING AUTISM CENTERS AND EARLY DETECTION
PROGRAMS NATIONWIDE, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND
FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects many Filipino individuals and families who continue to face significant challenges in accessing timely diagnosis, intervention, therapy, education, healthcare, and community support services. Limited public awareness, shortage of trained specialists, financial barriers, and unequal access to developmental services—particularly in underserved areas—often result in delayed intervention and reduced opportunities for persons on the autism spectrum.

This bill seeks to establish a comprehensive and inclusive national framework for autism care and support through the creation of regional Autism Centers, early detection and intervention programs, inclusive education support, professional training, research initiatives, and accessible community-based services. The measure likewise strengthens coordination among healthcare, education, and social welfare institutions to ensure continuity of care and long-term support for individuals with autism and their families.

Consistent with the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability, the Mental Health Act, and the Universal Health Care Act, this measure promotes a rights-based, evidence-informed, and family-centered approach to autism care while

encouraging inclusion, accessibility, dignity, and equal opportunity for persons on the autism spectrum.

By improving access to developmental services, strengthening public awareness, and supporting families and communities, this measure seeks to enhance the quality of life and full participation of persons with autism in society.

In view of the foregoing, approval of this bill is earnestly requested.



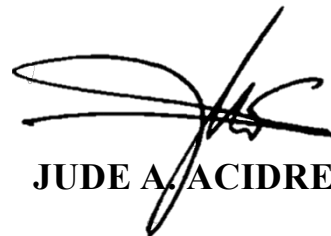
FERDINAND MARTIN G. ROMUALDEZ



YEDDA MARIE K. ROMUALDEZ



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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 Care and Support Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights, dignity, inclusion, and well-being of persons with disabilities, including persons on the autism spectrum, consistent with the Constitution, Republic Act No. 7277 or the “Magna Carta for Persons with Disability,” Republic Act No. 11036 or the “Mental Health Act,” Republic Act No. 11223 or the “Universal Health Care Act,” and other relevant laws.

The State shall adopt a comprehensive, inclusive, family-centered, community-based, and evidence-informed approach toward autism care through accessible screening, early detection, intervention, healthcare, education, rehabilitation, employment support, and social inclusion programs for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – For purposes of this Act, the following terms are hereby defined:

- a) “Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)” refers to a range of neurodevelopmental conditions characterized by differences in communication, social interaction, sensory processing, and patterns of behavior, with varying levels of support needs.
- b) “Autism Centers” refer to specialized facilities or designated units within healthcare institutions that provide developmental screening, diagnostic assessment, therapy, rehabilitation, family support, educational coordination, and community-based services for persons with ASD.
- c) “Early Detection and Intervention Program” refers to a coordinated system of developmental screening, assessment, referral, and evidence-informed intervention services designed to identify and support children with developmental concerns at the earliest possible stage.
- d) “Persons on the Autism Spectrum” refer to individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or related developmental conditions requiring support services.
- e) “Individualized Education Plan (IEP)” refers to a learner-centered educational support plan designed to address the specific developmental, behavioral, communication, and learning needs of a learner with ASD.

SEC. 4. *Establishment of Regional Autism Centers.* – The Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with local government units (LGUs), government hospitals, state universities and colleges (SUCs), and accredited non-government organizations (NGOs), shall establish or designate at least one (1) Autism Center in every region.

Priority shall be given to underserved and geographically disadvantaged areas.

The Autism Centers shall provide accessible and affordable services including:

- a) Developmental screening, diagnostic assessment, and referral services;
- b) Occupational therapy, speech therapy, behavioral therapy, physical therapy, psychosocial support, and related interventions;
- c) Parent, caregiver, and family counseling and training;
- d) Educational assessment and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) support in coordination with schools and the Department of Education (DepEd);
- e) Community-based rehabilitation and support services;
- f) Referral and coordination with healthcare providers, social welfare agencies, educational institutions, and employment support programs.

The DOH may accredit existing qualified facilities as Autism Centers subject to standards established under this Act.

SEC. 5. *National Early Detection and Intervention Program.* – The Department of Health, in coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), local government units, and other relevant agencies, shall establish a nationwide Early Detection and Intervention Program for Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The Program shall:

- a) Integrate developmental screening and autism risk assessment into existing maternal, child health, and immunization programs in public healthcare facilities;
- b) Train barangay health workers, nurses, midwives, pediatricians, teachers, daycare workers, and community healthcare personnel to identify developmental delays and autism-related indicators;
- c) Establish clear referral pathways for children requiring further developmental assessment and intervention;
- d) Ensure timely access to evidence-informed interventions and support services;
- e) Conduct nationwide information, education, and anti-stigma campaigns on autism awareness and inclusion.

Developmental screening under this Act shall respect parental participation, informed consent, and child rights standards.

SEC. 6. *Inclusive Education and Community Support.* – The Department of Education (DepEd), in coordination with the DOH, CHED, TESDA, and LGUs, shall strengthen inclusive education and community support systems for learners and individuals on the autism spectrum by:

- a) Expanding access to Special Education (SPED) and inclusive education programs;
- b) Providing training for teachers, guidance counselors, and school personnel on autism inclusion, classroom accommodations, and learner support strategies;
- c) Developing inclusive learning materials and reasonable accommodation guidelines;

- d) Supporting transition programs for adolescents and young adults with ASD toward higher education, skills training, employment, and independent living;
- e) Promoting autism-friendly schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

LGUs and communities are encouraged to establish support networks and inclusive community programs for persons with ASD and their families.

SEC. 7. *Capacity Building and Workforce Development.* The DOH, PRC, CHED, TESDA, and relevant professional organizations shall:

- a) Develop and strengthen training, certification, fellowship, and continuing professional education programs related to autism care and developmental services;
- b) Encourage the expansion of developmental and behavioral healthcare specialization programs;
- c) Provide scholarships, grants, incentives, or return-service programs for healthcare workers, therapists, educators, and specialists serving underserved areas;
- d) Promote interdisciplinary and community-based approaches to autism care and support.

SEC. 8. *Research, Data Management, and Policy Development.* – The DOH, in coordination with the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), academic institutions, and relevant agencies, shall:

- a) Establish and maintain a national autism database and information system consistent with Republic Act No. 10173 or the “Data Privacy Act of 2012”;
- b) Support research on autism prevalence, intervention outcomes, inclusive education, mental health, employment, and family support systems;

- c) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility, and regional coverage of autism-related services and programs;
- d) Develop evidence-informed policies and recommendations for autism inclusion and support.

Personal information collected under this Act shall be protected and processed in accordance with applicable data privacy and child protection laws.

SEC. 9. *Financial Accessibility and Health Coverage.* – The DOH and PhilHealth shall endeavor to improve access to affordable developmental, therapeutic, rehabilitative, and mental health services for persons on the autism spectrum consistent with existing laws and available resources.

The government shall encourage the inclusion and expansion of appropriate autism-related benefit packages under PhilHealth and other public healthcare financing mechanisms.

Indigent and financially vulnerable families shall be prioritized for subsidized services and assistance programs.

SEC. 10. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual appropriations of the Department of Health and participating agencies under the General Appropriations Act.

Local government units may allocate counterpart funding, facilities, personnel, equipment, and logistical support for the implementation of this Act.

The Program may also receive grants, donations, and development assistance from lawful domestic or international sources subject to existing laws, rules, and regulations.

SEC. 11. *Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability.* – The DOH shall establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of this Act and shall submit annual reports to Congress and the Office of the President containing:

- a) Number and distribution of Autism Centers established or accredited;
- b) Coverage of developmental screening and intervention services;
- c) Availability of trained professionals and support personnel;
- d) Budget utilization and program outcomes;
- e) Challenges, recommendations, and policy updates.

Periodic independent program reviews may likewise be conducted.

SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, in coordination with DepEd, DSWD, CHED, TESDA, PRC, PhilHealth, autism advocacy organizations, healthcare professionals, educators, and other relevant stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations.

SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 14. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

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

Approved,