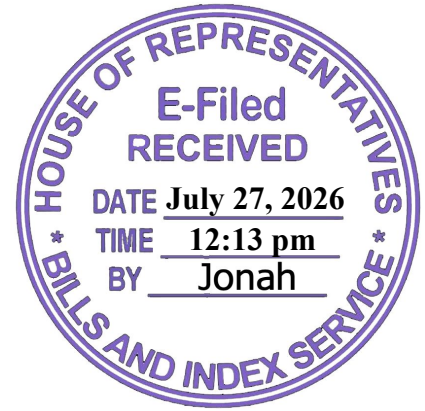


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10243



Introduced by **REP. JAVIER MIGUEL L. BENITEZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The State affirms its commitment to ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare services for all Filipinos. However, there remains a significant shortage of rehabilitation and allied health professionals, particularly occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language therapists, across the country, especially in underserved and rural areas. This gap limits access to essential services for persons with disabilities, children with developmental needs, the elderly, and patients recovering from illness or injury.

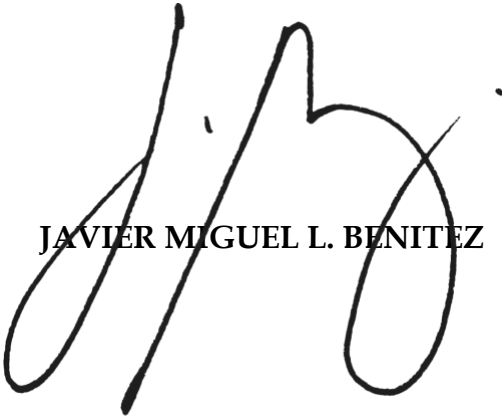
The demand for rehabilitation services continues to grow due to population aging, rising incidence of non-communicable diseases, and increasing awareness of developmental and speech-related conditions. Yet, the supply of qualified therapists remains insufficient and unevenly distributed, with most professionals concentrated in urban centers. As a result, many public hospitals, schools, and community-based facilities lack the necessary personnel to deliver these critical services.

This proposed measure seeks to address this gap by establishing a Scholarship and Return Service Program for students pursuing degrees in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech-Language Pathology. The program provides comprehensive financial support to qualified students and, in return, requires them to render service in public institutions and priority areas after licensure.

By linking education support with mandatory return service, the measure ensures that public investment in human capital directly translates into improved access to healthcare services. It also promotes a more equitable distribution of professionals by prioritizing deployment in underserved communities, where the need is greatest. Furthermore, the bill supports the long-term development of the country's healthcare workforce by encouraging more students to pursue careers in rehabilitation and allied health. It reduces financial barriers to education while providing a clear pathway to employment and public service.

This measure strengthens the healthcare system by addressing both the supply and distribution of essential health professionals. It ensures that Filipinos, regardless of location or socio-economic status, have access to rehabilitation services necessary for improved quality of life.

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



JAVIER MIGUEL L. BENITEZ

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HOUSE BILL NO. 10243

Introduced by **REP. JAVIER MIGUEL L. BENITEZ**

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS PURSUING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, PHYSICAL THERAPY, AND SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Therapists Para sa Bayan Act”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote the right to health by ensuring the availability, accessibility, and equitable distribution of qualified rehabilitation and allied health professionals throughout the country, particularly in underserved and disadvantaged areas.

Towards this end, the State shall strengthen the development of the healthcare workforce by providing accessible educational opportunities and establishing a Scholarship and Return Service Program for students pursuing degrees in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech-Language Pathology. In return, beneficiaries shall render service in public health institutions, schools, and community-based facilities to address critical gaps in rehabilitation and allied health services.

SEC. 3. *Scholarship and Return Service Program.* – There is hereby established a Scholarship and Return Service Program (SRSP) for deserving students who intend to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy, or Bachelor of Science in Speech-Language Pathology in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (HEIs) in regions where no SUC offers the said programs. The SRSP shall provide the following benefits:

- a) Free tuition and other school fees, including but not limited to: registration, library, and laboratory fees;
- b) Allowance for prescribed books, uniforms, and medical supplies;
- c) Transportation and living allowance, subject to guidelines to be issued; and,
- d) Allowances for licensure review and board examination fees.

SEC. 4. *Qualifications and Requirements.* — To qualify for the SRSP, an applicant must:

- a) Be a Filipino citizen residing in the Philippines;
- b) Be a graduate of a senior high school program or equivalent, or an undergraduate in good standing pursuing BS in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, or Speech-Language Pathology;
- c) Have passed the entrance examination and complied with the admission requirements of the SUC or private HEI; and,
- d) Not be a current holder of any similar scholarship or government study grant.

SEC. 5. *Conditions of the Scholarship.* — Qualified students under the SRSP shall:

- a) Sign a scholarship agreement with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), which shall administer the program;
- b) Carry the full academic load prescribed per semester by the curriculum of the SUC or private HEI;
- c) Complete the Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, or Speech-Language Pathology degree within the prescribed period, unless granted a valid leave of absence for justifiable reasons;
- d) Take the licensure examination for Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, or Speech-Language Pathology within one (1) year of graduation;
- e) Render return service under Section 7 of this Act.

SEC. 6. *Disqualification and Repayment.* – A scholar shall refund the full cost of the scholarship and all related benefits if:

- a) The scholar fails to complete the course within the prescribed period without valid cause;
- b) The scholar commits acts of misconduct or violations of the agreement as determined by the administering agency or the HEI;
- c) The scholar fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service.

SEC. 7. *Mandatory Return Service.* – Within one (1) year from obtaining a professional license, the scholar shall render at least two (2) years of return service in any of the following:

- a) Government hospitals, rural health units, public rehabilitation centers, or facilities operated by the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd), or local government units;
- b) Special education or geriatric institutions where Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, or Speech-Language Therapy services are needed;
- c) Other health facilities or community-based programs identified by CHED and DOH as service-priority areas.

Scholars may be appointed to such positions with corresponding salaries and benefits during their return service. Those who are not appointed within one (1) year may either:

- a) Reimburse the full cost of the scholarship; or
- b) Undertake an alternative compliance program to be formulated by CHED in consultation with relevant agencies.

To this end the DOH, DSWD, DepEd, and LGUs shall prioritize the hiring of Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Speech-Language Therapists with an active Return Service Agreement over similarly qualified candidates.

SEC. 8. *Allocation and Target Areas.* – CHED, shall determine the number of scholars and geographic allocation based on national and regional demand for Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Speech-Language Therapists prioritizing underserved and disadvantaged areas.

SEC. 9. *Monitoring and Compliance.* – CHED shall monitor scholars' academic progress and return service compliance in coordination with SUCs, HEIs, DOH, and other concerned agencies. Any violation shall be subject to sanctions under Section 6.

SEC. 10. *Sanctions for Non-Compliance.* – Any licensed therapist who received benefits under the SRSP but fails or refuses to render the mandatory return service shall be required to pay twice the amount of scholarship and benefits received, unless justified by force majeure or other valid grounds beyond the scholar's control.

SEC. 11. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act under the budget of CHED.

SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, CHED, in consultation with DOH and PRC, shall issue the implementing rules and regulations.

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

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