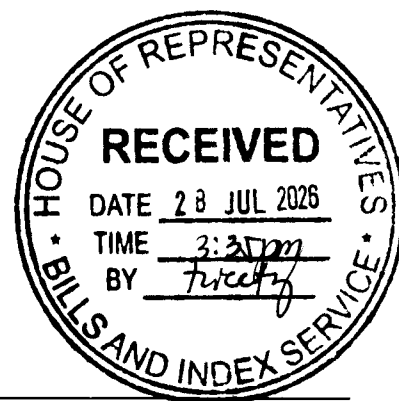


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10302



Introduced by: Rep. Keith Micah "Atty. Mike" D.L. Tan

AN ACT

STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR) AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPABILITIES OF EXISTING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, ENHANCING INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION DURING DISASTERS AND MASS CASUALTY INCIDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines remains highly vulnerable to earthquakes, typhoons, structural collapses, floods, landslides, fires, and other mass casualty emergencies. While existing laws provide a framework for disaster risk reduction and management, operational gaps remain in specialized rescue capability, rescue modernization, interoperable communications, and rapid inter-agency deployment.

Republic Act No. 10121 established the national disaster risk reduction and management framework, while Republic Act No. 11589 modernized the Bureau of Fire Protection. Recognizing these challenges, the Philippine Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) National Accreditation Body (NAB) recently finalized the Search and Rescue (SAR) Strategic Plan 2026–2036 to standardize capabilities across the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and key local government units.¹ However, administrative plans alone are not enough; there is still no comprehensive, permanent law that institutionalizes a unified national USAR capability, mandates integrated rescue standards, and ensures sustained funding among existing agencies.

This measure seeks not to create a new bureaucracy, but to strengthen and harmonize the mandates, coordination mechanisms, and specialized rescue capacities of existing agencies including the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), local government units (LGUs), and accredited rescue organizations. This bill institutionalizes national rescue standards, advanced rescue training, interoperable command systems, regional rapid deployment capabilities, and modernization support while respecting the statutory mandates of existing agencies.


Keith Micah "Atty. Mike" D.L. Tan
4th District, Quezon

¹ Office of Civil Defense. (2026, April 15). *USAR 10-year plan to boost rescue capabilities, finalized by accreditation body*. Philippine Information Agency. <https://pia.gov.ph/press-release/usar-10-year-plan-to-boost-rescue-capabilities-finalized-by-accreditation-body>

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**STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR) AND
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CASUALTY INCIDENTS, 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 Urban Search and Rescue and Emergency Response Modernization Act."

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to protect life, property, and public safety during disasters, structural collapses, and other mass casualty emergencies by institutionalizing a unified, modernized, and highly specialized national rescue capability. To this end, the State shall strengthen the specialized urban search and rescue (USAR) capacities of existing agencies, enhance nationwide rapid response mechanisms, and ensure seamless inter-agency coordination through interoperable communications and command systems. Furthermore, the State shall prioritize the continuous modernization of rescue equipment and the standardization of advanced training, while strictly maintaining and respecting the distinct statutory mandates and operational roles of existing national agencies and local government units.

SEC. 3. *Scope and Coverage.* – This Act shall apply to all national and local emergency response operations involving structural collapses, earthquakes, typhoons, severe flooding, landslides, fires, maritime incidents, industrial accidents, and mass casualty occurrences. It shall likewise cover all other natural or human-induced disasters, emergencies, and catastrophic events that necessitate the deployment of specialized USAR capabilities, advanced technical extrication, and highly coordinated inter-agency rescue operations.

SEC. 4. *Lead and Support Agency Framework.* – Nothing in this Act shall diminish or supersede the mandates of existing agencies under current laws.

Operational leadership shall remain as follows:

(a) The Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) shall remain the primary agency for fire suppression, urban rescue, and structural collapse response;

(b) The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) shall remain the primary agency for maritime search and rescue operations;

(c) The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) shall continue to exercise disaster coordination and policy functions under Republic Act No. 10121;

(d) Local Government Units (LGUs) shall retain primary responsibility for local disaster response pursuant to the Local Government Code and existing disaster laws;

(e) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) may provide augmentation, engineering, airlift, communications, logistics, and rescue support during large-scale emergencies.

SEC. 5. National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) System. – A National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) System is hereby institutionalized under the coordination of the Office of Civil Defense. The system shall establish comprehensive national rescue standards, accredit specialized rescue teams across various agencies and sectors, and maintain interoperable rescue protocols to ensure seamless cooperation. Furthermore, it shall ensure the nationwide deployability of rescue units and systematically coordinate multi-agency rescue operations during large-scale emergencies, disasters, and catastrophic events.

SEC. 6. Specialized Rescue Capability Development. – The State shall systematically develop, institutionalize, and maintain specialized rescue capabilities nationwide to address a wide spectrum of disasters and emergencies. These core operational capabilities shall include urban search and rescue, collapse rescue, flood and swift water rescue, landslide and mountain rescue, K9 search operations, and drone and technical search operations. Additionally, the system shall develop advanced competencies in hazardous materials response and mass casualty incident management to ensure a comprehensive, highly technical, and adaptive national response capability.

SEC. 7. National Urban Search and Rescue Standards. – The OCD, BFP, AFP, PCG, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), accredited rescue organizations, and other concerned agencies, shall formulate and periodically update National USAR Standards consistent with internationally recognized rescue doctrines and best practices.

The standards shall include, but shall not be limited to:

- (a) Rescue team classification and accreditation;
- (b) Personnel qualification standards;
- (c) Equipment and capability requirements;
- (d) Operational readiness benchmarks;
- (e) Deployment protocols;

- (f) Safety and risk management procedures;
- (g) Inter-agency coordination mechanisms; and
- (h) Incident command and rescue management systems.

SEC. 8. *National Rescue Accreditation Program.* – The OCD shall establish a National Rescue Accreditation Program to certify and classify government and qualified non-government rescue units based on operational capability, training standards, equipment readiness, and deployment capacity.

Only accredited rescue teams may be designated as deployable assets under the National USAR System.

SEC. 9. *National Rescue Training and Competency Development Program.* – All participating agencies shall develop and maintain standardized rescue training programs consistent with national standards.

The program shall include:

- (a) Urban search and rescue operations;
- (b) Structural collapse rescue;
- (c) Technical rope rescue;
- (d) Flood and swift water rescue;
- (e) Mountain and wilderness rescue;
- (f) Maritime rescue support operations;
- (g) Hazardous materials response awareness;
- (h) Emergency medical response and mass casualty management;
- (i) Incident Command System (ICS); and
- (j) Emerging rescue technologies and innovations.

The Civil Defense Academy, the National Fire Training Institute, AFP training institutions, PCG training centers, and other accredited institutions may serve as training providers.

SEC. 10. *National Rescue Communications and Interoperability Program.* – The OCD shall establish and maintain a National Rescue Communications and Interoperability Program to ensure effective coordination among responding agencies during emergencies.

The program shall include:

- (a) Interoperable radio communication systems;
- (b) Shared emergency communication protocols;
- (c) Common operating platforms and situational awareness systems;

(d) Emergency data-sharing mechanisms; and

(e) Redundant communication capabilities during disasters.

SEC. 11. *Regional Rapid Deployment Rescue Teams.* – Existing agencies shall designate and maintain Regional Rapid Deployment Rescue Teams capable of immediate mobilization to augment local responders during major emergencies.

The OCD shall maintain a national inventory of such teams and coordinate their deployment during large-scale incidents.

SEC. 12. *National Rescue Equipment Modernization Program.* – Subject to existing procurement laws and regulations, participating agencies shall prioritize the acquisition, upgrading, maintenance, and replacement of rescue equipment necessary to meet national standards.

The modernization program may include:

- (a) Technical rescue equipment;
- (b) Search cameras and detection devices;
- (c) Rescue vehicles;
- (d) Water rescue assets;
- (e) Rescue boats;
- (f) K9 support equipment;
- (g) Drone and unmanned systems;
- (h) Communications equipment;
- (i) Portable emergency medical facilities; and
- (j) Other specialized rescue technologies.

SEC. 13. *National Rescue Resource Inventory.* – The OCD shall establish and maintain a centralized inventory of rescue assets, equipment, specialized personnel, and deployable capabilities available nationwide.

All participating agencies shall regularly submit updated information to the inventory system.

SEC. 14. *Emergency Deployment and Mutual Aid Framework.* – During major disasters and emergencies, accredited rescue teams from participating agencies may be mobilized and deployed nationwide upon the request of affected local government units or upon the direction of competent authorities under existing disaster management laws.

Nothing herein shall diminish local autonomy nor alter existing chains of command established by law.

SEC. 15. *Local Government Rescue Capability Enhancement.* – The DILG, through the OCD and in coordination with local government units, shall promote the establishment and enhancement of local rescue capabilities.

LGUs are encouraged to establish adequately trained rescue teams and maintain rescue equipment appropriate to their hazard profiles.

SEC. 16. *Integration of Volunteer and Civil Society Rescue Organizations.* – Qualified volunteer rescue organizations, humanitarian groups, and civil society rescue units may participate in the National USAR System subject to accreditation and compliance with national standards.

The State shall encourage public participation, volunteerism, and community-based emergency response initiatives.

SEC. 17. *Research, Development, and Innovation.* – The Department of Science and Technology (DOST), in coordination with concerned agencies, shall support research, development, and adoption of innovative rescue technologies, disaster response tools, unmanned systems, communications platforms, and other technologies that enhance rescue effectiveness.

SEC. 18. *International Cooperation.* – The OCD and concerned agencies may engage in international cooperation, technical exchanges, joint exercises, and capacity-building activities with foreign governments, international organizations, and recognized rescue institutions, consistent with existing laws and national policies.

SEC. 19. *Annual Capability Assessment and Reporting.* – The OCD shall conduct periodic assessments of national rescue capabilities and submit an annual report to Congress containing:

- (a) Rescue capability assessments;
- (b) Equipment modernization status;
- (c) Training accomplishments;
- (d) Accreditation activities;
- (e) Deployment statistics; and
- (f) Recommendations for further improvements.

SEC. 20. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the OCD, BFP, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (NDRRMF), and other concerned agencies. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continuous modernization, equipment procurement, and maintenance of the USAR System shall be explicitly included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SEC. 21. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Office of Civil Defense, in coordination with the Bureau of Fire Protection, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine Coast Guard, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and other concerned agencies, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 22. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 23. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 24. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.