

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City
TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session
HOUSE BILL NO. 10353



Introduced by: **REP. ELMER V. CATULPOS**
(I Tahanan Partylist)

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Every traveler — whether a foreign visitor or a Filipino returning to the province — is searching for the same thing: a place to feel human again. In a world grown fast, tired, and lonely, people cross oceans not merely to see a beach or a mountain, but to feel, even for a few days, the way they felt as children: unhurried, cared for, at home. This longing is universal; it belongs to the rich and the poor alike. And there is no place on earth better suited to answer it than the Philippines — not only for the beauty of our islands, but for the warmth of our people. This is the promise of a delightful Philippines, and it is kept, every single day, by our tourism frontliners.

The beaches and mountains are a gift of God; but the delight that makes a visitor fall in love and return is made by human hands and human hearts — the boatman who steadied the outrigger, the guide who told every story, the driver who brought them home safe, the server who smiled through a long shift. Travelers say it themselves, in vlogs and podcasts watched by millions: they return to the Philippines for the Filipino — for the vibe, the kindness, the hospitality they find nowhere else. Every delighted tourist becomes a brand ambassador of our country; for it is our frontliners who turn beautiful places into delightful destinations, and who, through close and daily companionship with the guest, win them over.

We already know this Filipino magic, for the world has long paid for it. The same traits that make our Overseas Filipino Workers sought after in every corner of the earth — industrious, honest, sincere, warm even when far from home — are the very traits that magnetize tourists to our shores. Consider what this means. The Overseas Filipino Worker is a hero who must leave home and family to bring foreign money back to the Philippines. The tourism frontliner is a hero who brings that same foreign money home — without ever leaving, sleeping each night beside his own children. We honor, always, the hero who leaves; this measure builds a path for the hero who gets to stay. It is not a replacement for overseas work but its homegrown complement: the same service, to the same kind of guest, earning the same foreign money — kept here, spent here, with the family kept whole.

This path is also more sustainable. Overseas labor can shrink when other nations offer cheaper workers, or when machines and artificial intelligence take over the tasks. But the

work of making a weary human being feel welcome cannot be offshored and cannot be automated; and because the human longing for rest and belonging never disappears, tourism always recovers. That very truth — that shocks pass but the longing remains — is why, when calamity or crisis does strike, the State must be ready to carry its frontliners through, so that they are still standing when the travelers return.

Our neighbors have shown what direction can do. Thailand and Vietnam draw tens of billions of dollars because their governments treat tourism as a true national priority and guide and care for their tourism workers. Our islands are second to none, and our culture of joy and hospitality is, in truth, unmatched. What we have lacked is not beauty, but direction — and care for the people who deliver the experience.

For that care has been missing. For decades, tourism frontliners have been a marginalized and vulnerable sector — many informal, self-employed, and seasonal, with no social security, no health coverage, and no one guarding their welfare. When the pandemic emptied our beaches, and when typhoons and economic shocks struck, they were the first to lose their income and the last to receive help: no food on the table, no allowance for a child's schooling. A nation that asks its people to be the face of its hospitality cannot leave them defenseless when hardship comes.

Tourism is, moreover, among the most inclusive industries a nation can build. Alongside our world-class professionals, it opens dignified and well-supported livelihoods to Filipinos of every background and every level of schooling — because the Filipino gift for warmth, service, and genuine hospitality is a talent that no diploma can grant and no school can teach. Here, character is capital.

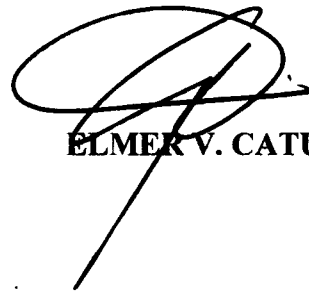
And the blessing does not stop with the frontliner. Every tourist a frontliner delights sets off a chain that lifts an entire community — the driver and the market vendor, the farmer who supplies the resort, the carpenter who builds the inn, the family that runs the sari-sari store nearby. Tourism, well tended, is one of the fastest, cheapest, and most homegrown hopes we have for a better future — and it belongs to every Filipino, not only to those who live by the sea.

This future must include our Indigenous Peoples, who are frontliners in their own right. For many travelers, the most meaningful experience of all is to witness a living culture — a way of life, a craft, a song handed down for generations. Supported on their own terms and with their own consent, our Indigenous communities can share their heritage with the world in a way that uplifts their lives and keeps our cultures and traditions alive and proud.

This measure also advances, for a sector long unseen, the very mission the President declared in his State of the Nation Address of July 27, 2026: “Misyon natin na mas marami pang Pilipino ang makakasapi sa SSS, lalo na ang impormal na sektor” — as he reported tens of thousands of drivers, vendors, and gig workers newly brought under social protection. Our tourism frontliners are precisely that informal sector: seasonal, self-employed, and long unprotected — and this bill brings them, at last, within the security the President envisions. And to the Overseas Filipino Workers whom the President rightly honored at length in the same Address, this measure offers the fitting complement: a path for the hero who serves the

same guests and earns the same foreign exchange — while sleeping each night beside his own children.

This bill honors the tourism frontliner as what he and she truly are: bayani — heroes who bring the world home to the Philippines. It gives them protection, dignity, security in hardship, and a fair reward for the joy they create; and in doing so, it invests in the pride and the future of every Filipino. In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'E' followed by a series of loops and a long diagonal stroke extending downwards and to the left.

ELMER V. CATULPOS

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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TWENTIETH CONGRESS
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HOUSE BILL NO. **10353**

Introduced by Representative ELMER V. CATULPOS

AN ACT RECOGNIZING TOURISM FRONTLINERS AS HEROES AND AS A MARGINALIZED AND VULNERABLE SECTOR, AND PROMOTING THEIR WELFARE THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION, FREE ACCREDITATION, TRAINING, SCHOLARSHIPS, RAPID ASSISTANCE DURING CALAMITIES AND ECONOMIC SHOCKS, AND A PERFORMANCE-BASED INCENTIVE PROGRAM, COMPLEMENTING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9593, 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 “Bayaning Tourism Frontliners Act” or the “Tourism Frontliners’ Welfare and Recognition Act.”

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to recognize tourism frontliners as bayani ng industriya ng turismo — the living face of Filipino hospitality and the human engine of a delightful Philippines — and to protect and uplift them as a marginalized and vulnerable sector deserving of the special concern of the State under the Constitution’s mandate of social justice. The State affirms that tourism is a national development priority and one of the fastest, most inclusive, and most homegrown paths to uplift the lives of ordinary Filipinos, and that its blessings, created by the frontliner, ripple outward to entire communities. Toward these ends, the State shall extend social protection, free accreditation, training, educational assistance, and rapid relief in times of calamity and economic shock to tourism frontliners, including those in the informal and self-employed sectors and Indigenous communities, and shall fairly reward those whose service attracts and delights visitors. This Act shall complement Republic Act No. 9593 and existing social-protection laws, addressing the welfare of the worker as the Tourism Act addresses the development of the enterprise.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. — As used in this Act:

- (a) Tourism frontliner refers to any person who, whether as an employee or as an informal or self-employed worker, directly serves or interacts with tourists, including but not limited to tour guides, tourist drivers, boatmen and bangkeros, porters, hotel, resort, and restaurant staff, airport and terminal crew, dive guides, homestay hosts, cultural performers, and accredited tourism-oriented vendors.
- (b) Informal tourism worker refers to a tourism frontliner who is self-employed or works without a formal employment relationship, and who is therefore not automatically covered by employer-based social protection.

- (c) Indigenous tourism frontliner refers to a member of an Indigenous Cultural Community or Indigenous People who participates, with the free and prior informed consent of the community, in the sharing of the community's living culture with visitors.
- (d) Marginalized and vulnerable sector, as applied to tourism frontliners, refers to their condition of limited access to social protection and their heightened exposure to loss of livelihood during calamities, pandemics, and economic shocks.
- (e) Marketing-frontliner incentive refers to the performance-based reward under Section 12 for frontliners whose service demonstrably attracts and satisfies tourists.
- (f) Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) refers to the consensus of an Indigenous community obtained in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997).

SECTION 4. Scope and Relationship to Existing Laws. — This Act shall complement Republic Act No. 9593 (Tourism Act of 2009) and shall be implemented in harmony with Republic Act No. 11199 (Social Security Act of 2018), Republic Act No. 11223 (Universal Health Care Act), Republic Act No. 9679 (Home Development Mutual Fund Law), Republic Act No. 7796 (TESDA Act), Republic Act No. 10931 (Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act), Republic Act No. 8371 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act), and Republic Act No. 10121 (Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act). The destination categorization and the Peace-and-order, Infrastructure, and Ease-of-doing-business (PIE) framework referred to herein are established and operationalized in the companion tourism measure of this Congress; this Act references them only to align the delivery of frontliner support.

SECTION 5. Coverage. — This Act shall cover all tourism frontliners as defined herein, whether employed or informal and self-employed, and whether serving in a Top Destination, a Rising Star Destination, or a Hidden Gem, and shall include Indigenous tourism frontliners under the safeguards of Section 13. Establishments employing tourism frontliners remain bound by their existing obligations under labor and social-protection laws; nothing in this Act shall diminish those obligations.

SECTION 6. Recognition as Bayani and as a Marginalized and Vulnerable Sector. — The State hereby recognizes tourism frontliners as “bayani ng turismo” and as a marginalized and vulnerable sector entitled to the special protection of the State. This recognition shall be the basis for the priority, subsidized, and rapid-response measures under this Act, and shall be given expression through a program of public honor and recognition to affirm the dignity and national value of their work.

SECTION 7. Social Protection for Tourism Frontliners. — Every accredited tourism frontliner shall be enrolled in the Social Security System, PhilHealth, and the Home Development Mutual Fund (Pag-IBIG). For employed frontliners, coverage shall follow existing employer-employee rules. For informal and self-employed frontliners who cannot shoulder the full contribution, the State shall subsidize, in whole or in part, their enrollment and contributions under this Act, in the manner and to the extent provided in the implementing rules and the annual appropriation. No accredited frontliner shall be left without basic social protection by reason of the informal nature of the work.

SECTION 8. Fair and Accessible Accreditation Through the Department of Tourism. — Accreditation under this Act shall be granted by the Department of Tourism (DOT) through its

Regional Offices, and shall be simplified, low-cost or free, and accessible to every qualified tourism frontliner. Local government units shall coordinate with and assist the DOT in the accreditation of frontliners within their jurisdictions; but accreditation shall not be withheld, monopolized, or controlled by any single office. So that no eligible frontliner is left out for lack of a single endorsement, a frontliner may apply for accreditation through any one of the following, none of which shall be required in addition to another:

- (a) Membership in a registered or community-recognized tourism association or cooperative;
- (b) Certification by the owner or operator of the establishment where the frontliner renders service;
- (c) Endorsement by any barangay, municipal, city, or provincial official, or by the local tourism office — any one such endorsement being sufficient;
- (d) Direct application by a group of not fewer than twenty (20) identified tourism frontliners;
- (e) Individual application supported by proof of actual service to tourists, for a frontliner not affiliated with any association or establishment; or
- (f) Community-based verification conducted by the DOT for informal frontliners, and, for Indigenous tourism frontliners, through the culturally appropriate track under Section 13.

Accreditation shall be based solely on the applicant's qualifications and actual service, and shall not be denied, delayed, or conditioned upon the political affiliation or non-affiliation of the applicant, or upon support for or opposition to any official, administration, or party. Where a local permit or clearance is a prerequisite to accreditation, the concerned office shall act upon it without discrimination and within the timelines prescribed by the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018; and where such a clearance is unreasonably withheld or delayed, the DOT may accept alternative proof of eligibility so that accreditation is not defeated.

Accreditation shall be the gateway to the social protection, training, scholarships, incentives, and rapid assistance under this Act. It shall not be used to exclude or penalize workers already serving in the industry, who shall be given a reasonable transition period and assistance to accredit.

SECTION 9. Rapid Assistance During Calamities and Economic Shocks. — Recognizing that tourism frontliners are among the first to lose their livelihood, and among the most defenseless, when disaster or crisis strikes, there is hereby established a rapid-assistance mechanism for accredited tourism frontliners. Upon the declaration of a state of calamity affecting a destination, or upon certification by the DOT of a severe decline in visitor arrivals to a destination by reason of pandemic, disaster, or economic shock, the State shall:

- (a) Release emergency income support to affected accredited frontliners, through account-based disbursement where feasible, on an expedited basis and coordinated with existing disaster-response and emergency-employment mechanisms;
- (b) Protect the continuity of the scholarships of their children under Section 11, ensuring these are not lost by reason of the shock; and
- (c) Give affected frontliners priority in retraining, re-tooling, and re-employment as the destination recovers.

This mechanism shall be designed for speed and shall operate in coordination with the disaster-response and financial-inclusion measures of this Congress.

SECTION 10. Skills Training and Certification. — The DOT, through the Office of Industry Manpower Development, together with TESDA, shall provide free and continuing skills training, upskilling, and certification for tourism frontliners — including language, safety, customer-

service, digital, and cultural-interpretation skills — prioritizing informal frontliners seeking to formalize and rise in the industry, and designed so that Filipinos of every background may enter and advance in the industry with dignity.

SECTION 11. Scholarships for Children of Tourism Frontliners. — A scholarship program is hereby established for the qualified children of tourism frontliners, administered by the DOT in coordination with the Commission on Higher Education and TESDA and aligned with the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, giving priority to the children of informal and low-income frontliners. The continuity of these scholarships shall be protected during calamities and economic shocks under Section 9

SECTION 12. Tourism Frontliner Incentive and Recognition Program. — There is hereby established a Tourism Frontliner Incentive and Recognition Program, administered by the DOT, to reward frontliners whose service attracts and satisfies tourists. The Program shall:

- (a) Provide performance-based incentives, which may take the form of additional take-home pay, cash awards, priority in training and scholarships, or public recognition;
- (b) Base awards on objective, transparent, and verifiable measures, such as validated tourist-interaction records and tourist-satisfaction feedback, and not on any political or arbitrary criterion;
- (c) Give particular recognition to frontliners whose service, including features with content creators and travel media, demonstrably increases visitor arrivals to a destination; and
- (d) Publish the criteria and the list of awardees to ensure fairness and guard against manipulation. The DOT shall maintain a simple, privacy-respecting, and auditable system of tourist-interaction records as the basis for these incentives, designed to minimize burden on the worker.

SECTION 13. Indigenous Peoples as Tourism Frontliners. — The State shall support the participation of Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples in tourism as a means of dignified livelihood and cultural preservation, strictly on their own terms. Such participation shall be community-led and shall proceed only with the Free and Prior Informed Consent of the community in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371, in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. The sharing of Indigenous culture shall respect the community's dignity, self-determination, and intellectual and cultural rights, shall provide for fair benefit-sharing accruing to the community, and shall never reduce any person or community to an object of display. Indigenous tourism frontliners shall be entitled to the protections and benefits of this Act.

SECTION 14. Alignment With Destination Categorization and the PIE Framework. — The support extended under this Act shall follow the destination map established under the companion tourism measure, which categorizes destinations as Top Destinations, Rising Star Destinations, and Hidden Gems and directs national and local support according to the Peace-and-order, Infrastructure, and Ease-of-doing-business (PIE) framework. This Act does not establish that categorization or framework, which are governed by the companion measure; it aligns the delivery of frontliner welfare so that support reaches frontliners in rising and emerging destinations, and not only in established ones.

SECTION 15. Implementing Agencies. — The DOT shall be the lead agency, in coordination with the Department of Labor and Employment, the DSWD, the SSS, PhilHealth, the Pag-IBIG Fund, TESDA, the Commission on Higher Education, the National Commission on

Indigenous Peoples, and local government units. Local government units shall assist in the accreditation, enrollment, and rapid assistance of frontliners within their jurisdictions.

SECTION 16. Appropriations. — The amount necessary to carry out this Act — particularly the subsidized social-protection enrollment of informal frontliners, the rapid-assistance mechanism, the incentive program, the training, and the scholarships — shall be provided as a distinct line item under a new appropriation in the annual General Appropriations Act, and shall not be sourced by diminishing existing tourism, labor, or social-welfare programs.

SECTION 17. Implementing Rules and Regulations. — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOT, in coordination with the DOLE, DSWD, SSS, PhilHealth, Pag-IBIG, TESDA, CHED, NCIP, DILG, and representatives of tourism workers, Indigenous communities, and tourism associations, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations. Failure to promulgate the same shall not prevent the implementation of this Act.

SECTION 18. Congressional Oversight. — A Congressional Oversight Committee, composed of the chairpersons and members of the appropriate committees of both Houses, shall monitor the implementation of this Act and review its effectiveness, particularly the coverage of informal frontliners and the timeliness of calamity assistance, within three (3) years from its effectivity.

SECTION 19. Separability Clause. — If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 20. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SECTION 21. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.