

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

Twentieth Congress
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10533



Introduced by **Representative RAYMOND ADRIAN E. SALCEDA**

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING A FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES AND
CAREGIVERS OF PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD),
PROVIDING FOR TRAINING, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, COMMUNITY-BASED
SUPPORT SERVICES, ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL REGISTRY OF PERSONS
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects one's social communication, behavior, learning, and daily functioning. This condition manifests in early childhood and varies widely in severity, with some individuals able to live independently while others require substantial, lifelong support.

In the Philippines, the Autism Society Philippines estimates that approximately one (1) in every one hundred (100) Filipinos, or about 1.2 million individuals, are on the autism spectrum. This underscores the importance of enhancing initiatives that promote inclusion, acceptance, early intervention, and improved quality of life for persons with ASD and their families.

Parents and caregivers are often the first to recognize developmental differences in their children and are primarily responsible for seeking assessment, intervention, and educational opportunities. However, many families encounter significant psychological issues throughout the diagnostic and caregiving process. The absence of adequate support mechanisms frequently leaves families to navigate these challenges on their own. While existing laws recognize and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, the vital role played by families and caregivers in the lifelong care and development of persons with ASD remains largely unsupported and unaddressed. Despite the indispensable role of families in the care and development of persons with ASD, existing programs remain limited and unevenly distributed across the country.

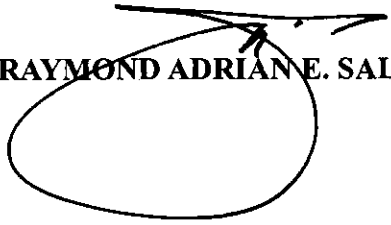
Access to specialized services, intervention programs, and trained professionals remains particularly difficult in rural and underserved communities. Furthermore, many educational institutions lack the resources and specialized personnel necessary to effectively accommodate learners with autism, resulting in barriers to inclusive and quality education.

Given these circumstances, there is a compelling need to strengthen support systems for families and caregivers of persons with ASD. Recognizing that families serve as the primary source of care, guidance, and advocacy for individuals on the autism spectrum, the State must ensure that families receive the necessary training, psychosocial support, community-based services, and other forms of assistance to effectively fulfill their role. The absence of accessible training programs, psychosocial services, and community-based interventions often limits their capacity to effectively respond to the unique needs of persons with ASD.

Through this proposed measure, the State shall establish a Family Support Program for Families and Caregivers of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to recognize and strengthen the vital role of families as partners in the care and development of persons with ASD. The proposed bill shall provide structured training, psychosocial support, and community-based intervention services to help families and caregivers in addressing the unique and lifelong needs of persons with ASD. By institutionalizing comprehensive family support, the State affirms its commitment to fostering an inclusive society in which persons with ASD and their families receive the assistance needed to achieve improved well-being and quality of life.

Every child, regardless of their differences, should be treated with dignity and respect and offered equal opportunities to achieve their full potential. Likewise, parents and primary caregivers, who are important to a child's development, must be recognized and supported as partners in care. Given the significant emotional, psychological, and caregiving demands they often experience, it is rightfully important to assess their needs and provide appropriate interventions and family-centered support services to promote the family's well-being.

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


RAYMOND ADRIANE E. SALCEDA

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

Twentieth Congress
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **10533**

Introduced by **Representative RAYMOND ADRIAN E. SALCEDA**

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING A FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES AND
CAREGIVERS OF PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD),
PROVIDING FOR TRAINING, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, COMMUNITY-BASED
SUPPORT SERVICES, ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL REGISTRY OF PERSONS
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) AND THEIR FAMILIES, 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 “Family Support for Persons with Autism Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State, consistent with Republic Act No. 11036 (Mental Health Act), Republic Act No. 11650 (Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act), Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities), Republic Act No. 7883 (Barangay Health Workers' Benefits and Incentives Act of 1995), and Republic Act No. 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991), to recognize families and primary caregivers of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as essential partners of the State in the provision of care, support, and development services. The State recognizes the need for Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) to make an integrated contribution to advancing community-centered health services and enabling access to government programs, including a community-based system of care and support that encompasses health, education, and social services for persons with autism and their families. Toward this end, the State shall mandate and institutionalize access to coordinated services and family-centered support mechanisms, including training, psychosocial support, and capacity-building programs for families of persons with autism.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

(a) *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)* refers to a specific neurodevelopmental disorder characterized primarily by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, along with restricted and repetitive behavior, interests, or activities;

(b) *Neurodevelopmental disorders* refer to a group of conditions originating during the developmental period that affect brain development and result in impairments in cognitive, social, academic, or occupational functioning;

(c) *Person with Autism (PWA)* refers to an individual diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder;

(d) *Diagnosis* refers to the identification of a medical or developmental condition based on the evaluation of an individual's signs, symptoms, history, and other relevant assessments;

(e) *Psychological support* refers to counseling, therapy, and other psychosocial services provided to address the emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of an individual;

(f) *Psychosocial support (PSS)* refers to interventions and services that address the psychological and social needs of individuals and families, including emotional support, counseling, and strengthening of family and community relationships to promote well-being;

(g) *Parent management training* refers to an evidence-based intervention that equips parents, guardians, or caregivers with behavioral strategies and skills to support the development of children with ASD and manage challenging behaviors;

(h) *Intervention* refers to any therapeutic, educational, behavioral, or support measure intended to improve functioning, address developmental needs, or prevent adverse outcomes among persons with ASD;

(i) *Primary caregiver* refers to the biological parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians, or relatives who have actual custody and bear primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of a Person with Autism; and

(j) *Barangay Health Worker (BHW)* refers to a person registered and accredited in accordance with Republic Act No. 7883.

SEC. 4. *Coverage.* – This Act shall apply to persons diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families and primary caregivers. Families and caregivers shall be acknowledged as crucial partners in the provision of inclusive education, developmental support services, and community-based mental health care. They shall be entitled to access coordinated services from health, education, and social welfare institutions, as provided under existing laws and this Act.

SEC. 5. *Family Support Program.* – There is hereby established a Family Support Program under the Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare

and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and local government units (LGUs). The Program shall ensure that support for persons with autism extends beyond clinical interventions to include home, school, and community settings.

SEC. 6. *Components.* – The Family Support Program shall adopt an integrated, rights-based, and community-based approach and shall include the following components:

(a) Capacity-building programs for parents and caregivers on autism-informed caregiving, behavior management, communication strategies, and home-based interventions;

(b) Parent education programs that complement school-based and community-based interventions under inclusive education settings;

(c) Family support groups, counseling services, and psychosocial interventions in support of the mental health and well-being of families of persons with autism;

(d) A coordinated referral and service delivery system linking health, education, and social welfare services;

(e) Structured coordination among families, mental health professionals, educators, barangay health workers, and concerned government agencies in the planning and delivery of services for persons with autism; and

(f) Subsidized community interventions and provision of financial assistance or service vouchers for indigent families to cover partial or full costs of specialized therapy, psychological evaluations, and continuous intervention, as integrated into existing medical assistance programs of the DOH and DSWD.

SEC. 7. *Family Support Coordination System.* – Each barangay, through its Barangay Health Station and within existing local capacities, shall assign an accredited Barangay Health Worker (BHW) to act as the Family Support Coordinator for families with individuals who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The appointed BHW will receive specialized, standardized training by the Department of Health (DOH) in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and other pertinent agencies, covering autism awareness, family support, care coordination, referral pathways, and accessible government services. Subject to the availability of local funds or national health subsidies, designated BHWs serving as Family Support Coordinators under this Act may receive specialized incentive honoraria, in accordance with guidelines to be issued by the DOH and DILG, without prejudice to existing benefits under Republic Act No. 7883.

SEC. 8. *Early Detection and Referral.* – The DOH, in coordination with DepEd, DSWD, DILG, LGUs, and accredited healthcare providers, shall establish and/or strengthen systems for early screening, identification, and referral of children with suspected ASD. Families shall be provided with timely post-diagnostic counseling, guidance, and access to coordinated intervention

services through both health and education systems. Under this Act, every Filipino child should have access to affordable and age-appropriate developmental screening services through public health facilities, subject to existing laws and available appropriations

SEC. 9. *Psychosocial Support.* – The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH) and local government units (LGUs), shall strengthen the capacity of their respective Local Social Welfare and Development Departments (LSWDD) to provide accessible, comprehensive, and responsive psychosocial support services for families and caregivers of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The services shall include counseling, stress management programs, and peer support systems, which shall be provided by or under the supervision of licensed mental health professionals.

SEC. 10. *National Registry, Data Management, and Stakeholder Participation.* – The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), local government units (LGUs), and other concerned agencies, shall establish, maintain, and regularly update a secure National Registry of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families who voluntarily avail of services under this Act. The Registry shall serve as the official database for the planning, coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and delivery of programs and services under this Act, and shall ensure that eligible persons with ASD and their families are identified and provided with appropriate assistance.

In the implementation of this Act, the DOH, in coordination with the DSWD, DepEd, DILG, NCDA, and LGUs, may engage and collaborate with duly accredited non-government organizations (NGOs), parent support organizations, professional associations, academic institutions, and other qualified private sector partners with demonstrated expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), inclusive education, developmental disabilities, mental health, and community-based rehabilitation. Such organizations and institutions may provide technical assistance, caregiver education and training, psychosocial support services, community awareness campaigns, research, capacity-building activities, program monitoring and evaluation, and other support services consistent with the objectives of this Act.

The participation of such organizations and institutions shall complement, and shall not diminish or replace, the primary responsibility of government agencies in the implementation of this Act.

The collection, processing, storage, and sharing of all personal and medical information under the National Registry shall strictly comply with Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations on data privacy and confidentiality.

SEC. 11. *Program Review.* – The Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with the other implementing agencies, will conduct a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the Family Support Program under the Family Support for Persons with Autism Act every three (3) years and provide recommendations and/or improvements based on the needs of families,

emerging best or better practices, and available evidence of such. This report shall be submitted back to Congress. It should include recommendations, accomplishments, utilization of services, and challenges for the improvement of family support services for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and other concerned agencies, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 13. *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. 14. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, 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,