

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City
TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session
HOUSE BILL NO. 10618



Introduced by: **REP. ELMER V. CATULPOS**
(1Tahanan Partylist)

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In every classroom in this country sits a child in the last row — smaller than the rest, quieter than the rest, tired before the day begins. Teachers know this child. And too often the world has already passed its verdict on this child: mahina, mabagal, walang sigla. But the world is reading the wrong thing. This child was hungry before this child was even born. What was taken from this child was never height. Ang ninakaw sa kanya ay hindi taas — kundi pagkakataon.

Stunting is what science calls it. It means that during the only window in which a human body and a human brain are built — the first 1,000 days, from conception to the second birthday — the nourishment required to build them did not arrive. The consequences are measurable and they are lifelong: children who were stunted are, by international findings, several times more likely to suffer impairments in cognitive development; they enter school late, repeat grades, leave earlier, and earn less as adults. And the cruelest fact of all is the clock. Ang unang 1,000 araw ay hindi nauulit. International health authorities describe the damage of stunting as largely irreversible, precisely because almost all of it occurs inside that single window — what is not built there can never fully be built afterward. Ang pagkakataong nawala sa unang 1,000 araw ay hindi na maibabalik. Prevention is therefore not merely the best answer available to the Republic. It is the only complete one — and prevention works.

This is not a warning about the future. It is a description of the present. The Food and Nutrition Research Institute of the Department of Science and Technology, in its 2025 Updating Survey, found that 25.3% of Filipino children below five years old are stunted — one in every four — and that this is the first increase in the prevalence of stunting since 2015. Hindi na lamang tayo bumabagal. Bumabalik na tayo. Some 3.4 million Filipino children under five are stunted today, and roughly 1.7 million more Filipinos are born every year, each one entering that same 1,000-day window and walking, cohort after cohort, toward a gate that locks behind them. And the burden is not shared equally: in some regions of Mindanao,

stunting has been recorded at nearly twice the rate of Metro Manila and Central Luzon. Ang gutom ay may mapa — at ang mapang iyon ay siya ring mapa ng kahirapan.

The nation has already paid for this, for a generation, without knowing it. The Cost of Hunger study found that more than half of our working-age population — some *32.6 million Filipinos in 2013 data* were undernourished and stunted before their fifth birthday, and that this group completed, on average, only 5.74 years of schooling against 7.16 years for their well-nourished countrymen. Nearly a year and a half of learning, quietly removed from each life before that life could object. The same body of work placed the annual economic loss at *₱328 billion, about 2.83% of GDP, in 2013 — and more recent estimates place the cost of stunting at roughly US\$8.1 billion, some ₱473 billion, a year;*— greater than the damage of the disasters we mourn every year on national television, yet it arrives without wind, without headlines, without a single photograph. Ito ang bagyong walang ingay: dumadaan taon-taon, at ang tanging naiwan nitong sira ay nasa loob ng ating mga anak.

Let this Representation be understood with absolute clarity, because the dignity of millions depends on the distinction. Hindi sila tamad. Ninakawan sila. The Filipinos who were stunted as children are today among the most industrious people on this earth — they are the vendors who open before dawn, the farmers, the drivers, the overseas workers who carry entire families on their backs. Their strength was never in question. What was taken from them was not their will but their chance — and the ferocity they have shown in spite of that theft is the truest measure of what they might have reached had we fed them in time. This bill is not an accusation against any Filipino. It is an accusation against a system that let hunger reach children who had no way to defend themselves.

And here is the grief that should keep this Congress awake: hindi natin malalaman kung sino sana sila. We will never know who those children could have been. Somewhere in the millions the Republic failed to feed in time were the engineer who would have designed our bridges, the doctor who would have stayed in her province, the teacher who would have changed a thousand lives, the inventor we are still waiting for. They were not lost to war or to calamity. They were lost to hunger, quietly, before their second birthday — and we will never even learn their names.

And now one scientific truth must be stated plainly, because millions of Filipinos will read this measure and wonder whether it is speaking about them. Stunting is a measure of populations, not a verdict upon persons. Its very definition is a statistical threshold devised to judge the health of a nation, and the researchers who built it warn that it is a poor classifier of any individual child: children on either side of that line face similar odds — and odds are not destinies. Irreversible is true of the window, of the opportunity, and of what this Republic has already lost. It is not true of any Filipino's life. Kung ikaw man ay isa sa mga batang nagutom noon: ang sipag at tibay na ipinakita mo ay hindi katunayan ng iyong kakulangan — patunay ito kung ano sana ang naabot mo kung binigyan ka lang ng nararapat. Hindi tanong ng batas

na ito kung sino ang kulang. Ang tanong ay kung ilan pang bata ang hahayaan nating magutom.

Neither does the closing of the window end the duty of the State. Longitudinal studies following thousands of children across several countries found that those who regained growth after infancy scored no differently in vocabulary and numeracy from children who were never stunted, and achieved better schooling outcomes than those who remained stunted. And the factors that predicted that recovery were not the luck of birth: they were grandparents in the home, mothers who were themselves better nourished, help that arrived early. Ang tinatawag nating swerte ay kadalasang pangalan lamang ng isang taong nag-alagang mabuti. Hindi dapat kailanganin ang himala upang umangat ang isang Pilipino — ang pag-angat ay hindi dapat ipinagpapalad, dapat ito ay pinaplano. This bill therefore refuses to abandon the child already past the window: it commands that every child found stunted thereafter be linked to feeding, health, and learning support. Ang bintana ng pag-iwas ay nagsasara; ang tungkulin ng Republika, hindi.

Congress has already begun this work, and this measure honors it. Republic Act No. 11148, the Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act of 2018, institutionalized the first 1,000 days strategy; Republic Act No. 11037 feeds our schoolchildren; Republic Act No. 10028 protects breastfeeding; Executive Order No. 51 shields infant feeding from commercial pressure. These are good laws. But eight years after Republic Act No. 11148, the offices of the National Nutrition Council are still publicly appealing to local governments to comply with it; a mother in a far barangay still cannot say what she and her child are entitled to receive, from whom, and when; and the Barangay Nutrition Scholar who weighs her baby still serves under a Presidential Decree issued in 1978, for a token honorarium, carrying the future of this nation on a volunteer's allowance. The services exist as programs. They do not yet exist as a guarantee. At ang pangakong nakasalalay sa badyet ng bawat taon ay hindi pangako — ito ay pag-asa lamang.

This bill converts the promise into a guarantee. It establishes the First 1,000 Days Guarantee Package — a defined, published list of the services every Filipino mother and every Filipino child from conception to the second birthday is entitled to receive by right: prenatal nutrition and supplementation, lactation support, complementary feeding from the sixth month, quarterly growth monitoring, and counseling — written plainly enough to be posted on the wall of every barangay health station, so that a mother need not beg for what the law already owes her child. It fixes a National Stunting-Free Target and requires an annual Scorecard published province by province and city by city — so that every member of this Chamber will be able to read, each year, the number that belongs to the children of his or her own district. It professionalizes the Barangay Nutrition Scholar at last. It creates the Lusog-Simula Matching Fund, with first priority to the poorest local governments, so that a child's growth ceases to depend on the wealth of the town where that child was born. And it protects every child from the second injury: no learner shall ever be labeled, ranked,

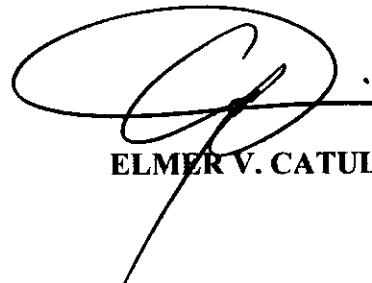
segregated, or excluded because of a nutritional measurement — because a child's height is health information, never a verdict on the child.

This measure is also built to be believed. Every entitlement it creates is measurable, every result it claims is verifiable by independent audit, and every peso it moves is traceable — an architecture our own government has already proven works, through nutrition programs whose grants to local governments are released against results confirmed by third-party verification. Ang programang kayang patunayan ang resulta ay programang pinagkakatiwalaan — ng sariling bayan, at ng buong mundo. A Republic that can prove what it achieved for its children will never lack partners willing to help it achieve more.

This bill is likewise the companion and the completion of the *Libreng Panganak Act* filed by this Representation. That measure answers the day of birth; this one answers the thousand days around it. Hindi natin ililigtas ang ina sa panganganak para lamang magutom ang kanyang anak sa mga buwang hindi na maibabalik. Ligtas na pagsilang, malusog na paglaki: dalawang batas, iisang pangako. And it answers the mission the President set before the nation in his State of the Nation Address of July 27, 2026 — “SECURITY and SELF-SUFFICIENCY” — for there is no security more fundamental, and no self-sufficiency more literal, than a generation permitted to grow to its full, God-given measure. Food security that fills our warehouses but not the plate of a two-year-old in a far barangay is not yet security.

Every year we deliberate, an entire cohort of Filipino children passes through the only window they will ever have. Ang batas ay maaaring maghintay ng isa pang Kongreso. Ang bata, hindi. We will never know who we already lost. But we know exactly who we can still save: the 3.4 million children inside that window this very morning, and every child conceived while this Chamber is in session. Ang Republika ay kasintaas lamang ng itinataas nitong mga bata.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line and a diagonal stroke.

ELMER V. CATULPOS

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
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HOUSE BILL NO. **10618**

Introduced by Representative ELMER V. CATULPOS

**AN ACT DECLARING THE ELIMINATION OF CHILDHOOD STUNTING
A NATIONAL PRIORITY, ESTABLISHING THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS
GUARANTEE PACKAGE, A NATIONAL STUNTING-FREE TARGET AND
PUBLISHED SCORECARD, PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM
STIGMATIZATION, PROVIDING CONTINUING SUPPORT BEYOND THE
WINDOW, PROFESSIONALIZING BARANGAY NUTRITION
WORK, ACCELERATING AND FULLY FUNDING THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11148, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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

ARTICLE I — GENERAL PROVISIONS

Section 1. Short Title. — This Act shall be known and cited as the “Lusog-Simula Act,” or the “First 1,000 Days Guarantee and Anti-Stunting Acceleration Act of 2026.”

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to secure for every Filipino child the full physical and cognitive development that adequate nutrition in the first one thousand (1,000) days of life makes possible. The State declares that childhood stunting is a preventable, nutrition-driven loss of human potential — never a fault, a character, or a destiny of any child, family, or community; that the services which prevent it shall exist as an enforceable guarantee and not as a discretionary program; that no child's growth shall depend on the wealth of the local government of that child's birth; and that no person shall ever be diminished, labeled, or excluded by reason of nutritional status. The elimination of childhood stunting is hereby declared a national priority.

Section 3. Objectives. — This Act shall have the following objectives:

- (a) To define and establish minimum public health and nutrition services available to every pregnant woman and child residing in the Philippines during the first 1,000 days of life.
- (b) To fix a national stunting-reduction target with transparent accountability published at the provincial and city level.
- (c) To accelerate and provide national financial and technical assistance for the implementation of Republic Act No. 11148 across all local government units.
- (d) To professionalize and protect barangay nutrition work.
- (e) To protect every child from stigmatization, disclosure, or exclusion arising from nutritional measurement.
- (f) To ensure continuing health, feeding, and learning support for children found stunted beyond the first 1,000 days. and
- (g) To break the intergenerational transmission of poverty at its earliest and most preventable point.

Section 4. Definition of Terms. — As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- (a) *First 1,000 Days* refers to the period from conception to the child's second birthday, consistent with Republic Act No. 11148.
- (b) *Stunting* shall have the meaning defined under applicable law and technical standards issued by the competent national authority and refers to a condition identified through anthropometric assessment. It shall never be used as a characteristic, classification, or judgment concerning the worth or potential of a person.
- (c) *Guarantee Package* refers to the services enumerated in Section 5.
- (d) *Scorecard* refers to the annual publication under Section 6.
- (e) *Priority Convergence Areas* refers to the localities identified under Section 7.
- (f) *Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS)* refers to the barangay-based nutrition worker under Presidential Decree No. 1569, as modernized by this Act.
- (g) *Independent Verification* refers to the confirmation of reported results by a party independent of the reporting agency or local government, as provided in Section 18.

ARTICLE II — THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS GUARANTEE

Section 5. The First 1,000 Days Guarantee Package. — Every Filipino mother and every Filipino child, from conception until the child's second birthday, shall be entitled, free of charge, to the following services, delivered at the barangay level through rural health units and barangay health and nutrition stations in accordance with Republic Act No. 11148:

- (a) Prenatal nutrition services, including iron-folic acid and other micronutrient supplementation and nutrition counseling for the pregnant mother.
- (b) Lactation support, including counseling and the protection of breastfeeding consistent with Republic Act No. 10028 and Executive Order No. 51, s. 1986.
- (c) Complementary feeding support for children from six (6) to twenty-three (23) months, including supplementary feeding for children identified as nutritionally at risk.
- (d) Growth monitoring of every child at least once every quarter, with immediate referral and intervention for any child found stunted, wasted, or at risk.
- (e) Linkage to immunization, deworming, and early childhood development services under existing law. and
- (f) Nutrition counseling for parents and caregivers.

The Guarantee Package shall be published in plain Filipino and, where practicable, in the local language and posted conspicuously in every rural health unit and barangay health and nutrition station.

Nothing in this Section shall be construed as requiring a particular medical intervention contrary to applicable clinical standards or the professional judgment of a duly licensed health professional.

Section 6. National Stunting-Free Target and Published Scorecard. — The State adopts the national target of reducing the prevalence of stunting among children under five to not more than *fifteen percent (15%) by 2032, and to single digits by 2040*. The National Nutrition Council (NNC) shall publish, not later than July of every year, a National Stunting Scorecard reporting the prevalence of stunting and the delivery of the Guarantee Package for every province and highly urbanized city, in a form accessible to the public and transmitted to both Houses of Congress. The Scorecard shall report conditions and services; it shall never identify, rank, or disclose the nutritional status of any individual child.

Section 7. Priority Convergence Areas. — The NNC shall annually identify the provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays bearing the highest burden of stunting, using the national nutrition surveys and the standardized targeting system under existing law. Priority Convergence Areas shall receive first priority in the Matching Fund under Section 14, augmented outreach including mobile health and nutrition services for geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, and intensified monitoring.

Section 8. First 1,000 Days Registry. — The Department of Health (DOH), with the NNC, shall maintain a unified registry of mother-child pairs and growth monitoring results for the delivery of the Guarantee Package and the identification of children at risk. The registry shall be maintained in strict compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, used exclusively for health and nutrition purposes, and never for any political, commercial, punitive, or discriminatory purpose.

The implementing rules shall provide for data minimization, access controls, retention periods, security safeguards, lawful inter-agency sharing, and breach-response procedures.

Section 9. Protection Against Stigmatization. — The nutritional status of any child is health information and shall be treated as confidential. No child shall be labeled, ranked, published, segregated, denied enrollment, denied participation, or in any manner excluded from any school, program, service, or opportunity by reason of nutritional status; nor shall such status be recorded in any academic or employment record. Growth monitoring shall be conducted with sensitivity to the dignity of the child and the family, and counseling shall address the causes of undernutrition without imputing fault to any parent or caregiver. Any violation of this Section shall be a ground for administrative liability of the officer or personnel responsible, without prejudice to liability under Republic Act No. 10173 and other laws.

Section 10. Continuing Support Beyond the First 1,000 Days. — The closing of the first 1,000 days ends the opportunity for prevention; it shall never end the duty of the State to care. Any child found to be stunted after the second birthday shall be referred and linked, through the rural health unit, the school's division, and the local social welfare and development office, to:

- (a) Supplementary and school-based feeding under Republic Act No. 11037 and other existing programs;
- (b) Continuing health, micronutrient supplementation, immunization, and deworming services;
- (c) Early childhood care and development, and learning support under existing law; and
- (d) Counseling and social protection or livelihood referral for the family.

No child shall be excluded from any program by reason of having passed the first 1,000 days, and no representation shall be made to any parent or caregiver that a child beyond the window is beyond help.

ARTICLE III — THE FRONTLINE

Section 11. Professionalization of Barangay Nutrition Work. — There shall be at least one (1) Barangay Nutrition Scholar in every barangay, subject to applicable staffing and funding standards. The BNS shall receive a monthly honorarium based on the amount prescribed under applicable law, the General Appropriations Act, and standards jointly issued by the NNC and the DBM. In addition, the BNS shall also be entitled to standardized training and certification through the NNC, accident and health insurance coverage, subject to appropriation and applicable law and recognition of relevant BNS training and experience in the evaluation of qualifications for appropriate government positions, without exemption from constitutional and civil-service merit-and-fitness requirements. Presidential Decree No. 1569 is hereby amended only to the extent specifically provided in the amendatory provisions of this Act.

Section 12. Local Nutrition Program Officers. — Every province, city, and municipality shall designate or appoint a Nutrition Program Officer responsible for the local implementation of this Act and Republic Act No. 11148, consistent with NNC policy. Compliance with this Section shall be a condition for access to the Matching Fund.

Section 13. Convergence and Lead Accountability. — The NNC shall be the lead coordinating body for this Act. The DOH, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Education, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the local government units shall implement their respective components

under an annual convergence plan published by the NNC. The NNC secretariat shall be strengthened and resourced for this purpose.

ARTICLE IV — FUNDING, VERIFICATION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Section 14. The Lusog-Simula Matching Fund. — There is hereby established the Lusog-Simula Matching Fund, administered by the NNC, through which the National State shall match and augment the nutrition appropriations of local government units for the delivery of the Guarantee Package and the honoraria under Section 11. The Fund shall be appropriated and released in accordance with the General Appropriations Act, applicable budgeting, accounting, auditing, procurement, and DBM rules, and a published allocation formula, with first priority to Priority Convergence Areas and lower-income-class municipalities. The allocation formula shall also consider geographic isolation, poverty, disaster and conflict exposure, population, service-delivery gaps, and local fiscal capacity.

Section 15. Local Nutrition Appropriations. — Access to the Matching Fund shall be conditioned on the local government unit appropriating, in its annual budget, a dedicated nutrition program line implementing this Act, in an amount consistent with the standards set by the NNC in the implementing rules. Nothing in this Act shall diminish existing local nutrition appropriations.

Section 16. Nutrition Honor Roll. — The NNC shall annually recognize the local government units achieving the greatest verified reductions in stunting and the fullest delivery of the Guarantee Package, which recognition shall be considered in the performance-based incentive systems of the National Government.

Section 17. Integrity of the Program. — Consistent with Executive Order No. 51, s. 1986, no component of this Act covering the first 1,000 days shall be implemented in partnership with, or accept sponsorship or donation from, any manufacturer or distributor of products within the scope of said Order. All commodities procured under this Act shall comply with existing nutrition standards.

Section 18. Independent Verification of Results. — The delivery of the Guarantee Package and the results reported under this Act shall be measured through indicators fixed in the implementing rules and subject to Independent Verification. The NNC, with the DOH and the Department of Budget and Management, shall establish a system of verification by parties independent of the reporting agency or local government — which may include academic institutions, professional organizations, civil society, or development partners — and the results so verified shall be the basis of releases from the Matching Fund, of the recognition under Section 16, and of the Scorecard under Section 6. Programs and financing extended by development partners in support of the objectives of this Act shall likewise be aligned with the same verified indicators, provided that no such partnership shall diminish any entitlement under this Act nor condition any service upon its availability. Verification shall be conducted at the level of services and localities, and never by the identification of individual children.

Section 19. Annual Report to Congress. — The NNC and the DOH shall jointly submit to both Houses of Congress, together with the Scorecard, an annual report on the implementation of this Act, including the utilization of the Matching Fund, the status of BNS deployment and honoraria, the results of Independent Verification, and progress against the national target.

ARTICLE V — FINAL PROVISIONS

Section 20. Relationship to Other Laws. — This Act accelerates and strengthens, and shall never be construed to diminish, Republic Act No. 11148, Republic Act No. 11037,

Republic Act No. 10028, Republic Act No. 11210, Republic Act No. 10173, Executive Order No. 51, s. 1986, and other existing laws for maternal and child health and nutrition.

Section 21. Appropriations. — The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act, including the initial capitalization of the Lusog-Simula Matching Fund, shall be charged against the current appropriations of the implementing agencies, augmented by an initial appropriation of Two Billion Pesos (₱2,000,000,000.00). Thereafter, the amounts necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 22. Implementing Rules and Regulations. — The DOH and the NNC, with the DILG, the DSWD, the DA, the DepEd, and the DBM, and in consultation with local government leagues, health and nutrition workers' organizations, and civil society, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations of this Act within ninety (90) days from its effectivity. Failure to promulgate the rules shall not prevent the implementation of the self-executing provisions of this Act, including Sections 5, 9, and 10.

Section 23. Separability Clause. — If any provision or part of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions or parts not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 24. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act, including inconsistent provisions of Presidential Decree No. 1569, are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 25. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.