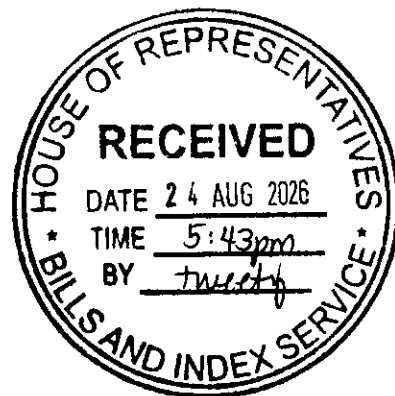


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10921



Introduced by Representative ELMER V. CATULPOS
(I Tahanan Party-List)

EXPLANATORY NOTE

At five in the morning, the training workshop in Surallah, South Cotabato already smells of acetylene and hot metal. Jomar, nineteen, holds his welding mask with both hands the way other young men hold a basketball — carefully, like a future. In eight weeks he will pass his National Certificate II assessment, the first document with the seal of the Republic that anyone in his family has ever earned. Then he will ask the question that quietly ends this story for tens of thousands of young Filipinos every year: “Ano po ang susunod na baitang?” And his instructor — who has taught for twenty years beside machines older than Jomar — will give the only honest answer he has: wala na rito, anak. The next rung of the ladder is in another region, in another city, at a price that his mother’s sari-sari store cannot pay.

Here is the truth that almost no one outside the education committees knows. Of the **more than twelve thousand** technical-vocational programs registered across the country, **only twenty-six reach National Certificate IV** — sixteen one-hundredths of one percent. This is the finding of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2), through a study presented by Ateneo-EDCOM 2 research fellow Christopher Chua. Our youth are not stopping at the bottom of the ladder by choice. We built them a ladder with the top rungs missing.

The numbers confirm what the workshop already knows. EDCOM 2 found that the bulk of the nation’s offerings sit at National Certificate II, the lower tier of the Philippine Qualifications Framework, while diploma-level programs remain scarce and unevenly distributed across regions. The Commission likewise found that the devolution of community-based training to local governments — mandated by Section 29 of Republic Act No. 7796 as early as 1994, and planned as far back as 2005 — was never carried out: only five institutions were ever devolved, and only one survives. Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has already recognized the polytechnic answer, approving on third reading the conversion of the Agusan del Sur School of Arts and Trades into the Agusan del Sur Polytechnic Institute, and

similar measures for other provinces are pending. But a Republic of eighteen regions cannot build its skills ladder one hometown bill at a time. The regions with champions will climb; the regions without will wait.

This Representation is grateful for the direction the national leadership has set. In his 2026 State of the Nation Address, the President declared that the mission of government support has shifted from mere uplift to “*SECURITY and SELF-SUFFICIENCY*” -- from carrying our people through crisis, to arming them to stand on their own. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, under Director General Jose Francisco “Kiko” Benitez, has placed polytechnic institutes on its own priority legislative agenda and has brought industry into the classroom through the Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) Framework Act, Republic Act No. 12063, which the Director General himself co-authored in Congress. EDCOM 2, under Co-Chairpersons Senate President Sherwin Gatchalian and Representative Roman Romulo, has given the country the most honest audit of its skills system in a generation, and Senator Loren Legarda has begun the long-overdue modernization of the TESDA charter itself. The policy is present. The audit is present. The industry framework is present. What remains missing is the architecture: in most regions of the country, no institution exists that can deliver the top of the ladder.

Let it be said plainly: the antagonist of this measure is not any school, not any training center, and least of all any instructor. Our technology institutions and their teachers have carried this Republic’s workshops for decades with aging machines and unbroken devotion. The antagonist is the missing system — a network of excellent but scattered schools, each too small to climb alone, none authorized to become what its region needs. This bill does not close a single school. It promotes every one of them.

The clock is not neutral. The Fourth Industrial Revolution does not wait for architecture, and the largest generation of Filipino youth in history is passing through our training centers now. Every year this measure is delayed, another cohort of Jomars finishes the second rung, looks up, and finds air.

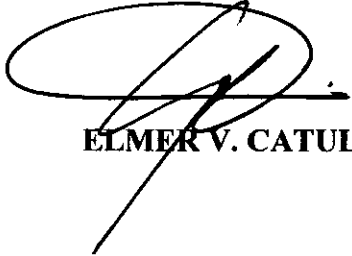
The architecture of this bill is one principle, applied three ways: ***the State shall regulate the many, and operate the few — at the level only the Republic can.*** First, it consolidates upward: all TESDA-administered training institutions in each region are unified into one Regional Polytechnic Institute with a main campus and specialized constituent campuses, mandated to deliver the higher qualifications — National Certificate III to V and diploma programs — that almost no one else can. Second, it devolves downward: as each Institute rises, community-based foundational training transitions to capable and willing local governments, funded and supported, finally executing the thirty-year-old command of Section 29 of the TESDA Act. Third, it docks sideways: each Institute serves as its region’s hub under the EBET Framework Act; every locally-legislated polytechnic becomes its region’s flagship campus

with honor, not competition; and the entire System is built to operate under the modernized TESDA charter now advancing in the Senate.

This Representation discloses its interest first, as is its practice. The author founded and chairs enterprises that employ more than one thousand Filipinos in media, pharmaceutical distribution, retail, hospitality, and security. In the hiring halls of those enterprises, the same résumé repeats by the thousands: NC II, and nothing after. This bill is written by an employer who has read ten thousand résumés that stop at the second rung — and who would rather legislate the ladder than keep counting.

Ang anak ng mangingisda ay hindi na kailangang umalis ng rehiyon para umakyat ng hagdan. Isang politekniko sa bawat rehiyon, isang hagdan para sa bawat Pilipino.

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



ELMER V. CATULPOS

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10921

*Introduced by **Representative ELMER V. CATULPOS***
(I Tahanan Party-list)

**AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE REGIONAL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
SYSTEM, CREATING A REGIONAL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE IN EVERY
REGION UNDER THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY, RATIONALIZING THE DELIVERY OF HIGHER-LEVEL
TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, PROVIDING FOR
THE ORDERLY DEVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING TO LOCAL
GOVERNMENT UNITS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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

ARTICLE I
GENERAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 1. *Short Title.* — This Act shall be known as the “**Aral-Asenso Act**” and shall be formally cited as the “Regional Polytechnic Institutes System Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* — It is the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to maintain an integrated system of education and training responsive to national, regional, and local development needs. Consistent with Article XIV of the Constitution and Republic Act No. 7796, the State shall strengthen public technical-vocational education and training, particularly programs leading to higher-level qualifications. The State shall promote accessible regional pathways from technical-vocational qualifications to higher education, enterprise-based training, employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. The State shall rationalize public provision of technical-vocational education while preserving national standards, quality assurance, competency assessment, and certification under the authority of TESDA and other agencies exercising jurisdiction under existing law.

SEC. 3. *Objectives.* — This Act has the following objectives:

(a) To unify all training institutions administered by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in each region into a single Regional Polytechnic Institute with a main campus and specialized constituent campuses;

- (b) To expand the national supply of higher-level technical qualifications — National Certificate III, IV, and V, and diploma programs under the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) — in every region;
- (c) To align each campus's program specialization with the comparative advantages and priority industries of its regional economy;
- (d) To operationalize ladderized pathways from certificate to diploma to degree, and enterprise-based training under Republic Act No. 12063;
- (e) To rationalize public provision of training by finally implementing the devolution of community-based training to local government units under Section 29 of Republic Act No. 7796; and
- (f) To prepare the Filipino youth and workforce for present and emerging livelihoods, ensuring their security and self-sufficiency.

SEC. 4. *Definition of Terms.* — As used in this Act:

- (a) *System* refers to the Regional Polytechnic Institute System established under this Act, composed of all Regional Polytechnic Institutes;
- (b) *Institute* refers to a Regional Polytechnic Institute created in a region under this Act;
- (c) *Constituent campus* refers to a TESDA-administered technology institution, regional training center, provincial training center, or specialized training center integrated into an Institute;
- (d) *Higher-level qualifications* refer to programs registered at National Certificate III and above, including diploma programs, under the Philippine Qualifications Framework;
- (e) *Community-based training* refers to foundational and livelihood skills programs, generally at National Certificate II and below, delivered at the community level;
- (f) *EBET* refers to Enterprise-Based Education and Training under Republic Act No. 12063;
- (g) *Authority* refers to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority created under Republic Act No. 7796, or its successor under any subsequent charter.

SEC. 5. *Coverage* — This Act shall apply to administrative regions of the Philippines, except to the extent that its application is inconsistent with the Constitution, Republic Act No. 11054, other organic laws, or valid intergovernmental arrangements.

The application of this Act in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao shall be subject to the powers and functions of the Bangsamoro Government under Republic Act No. 11054 and to applicable intergovernmental relations mechanisms. Any adoption by the Bangsamoro Government shall be effected through the legally authorized mechanism and shall not diminish the powers, authority, or autonomy granted to the Bangsamoro Government by law.

ARTICLE II

THE REGIONAL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE SYSTEM

SEC. 6. *Establishment of the System.* — There is hereby established the Regional Polytechnic Institute System. In each administrative region there shall be created one (1) Regional Polytechnic Institute, which shall be a public post-secondary technical education institution under the supervision of the Authority. Each Institute shall bear the name of its region in the form “[Region] Polytechnic Institute,” or such other dignified name as the TESDA Board may

approve: *Provided*, That no Institute or campus shall adopt an acronym or short name that carries a derogatory or unfortunate meaning in any Philippine language or in English.

SEC. 7. *Composition of Each Institute.* — All technology institutions, regional training centers, provincial training centers, and specialized training centers directly administered by the Authority within a region are hereby integrated into the Institute of that region as its constituent campuses, retaining their historic names as campus designations. Training institutions created by special law are likewise integrated, and their charters are deemed amended accordingly, without prejudice to Section 10 of this Act.

SEC. 8. *Main Campus.* — The TESDA Board shall designate the main campus of each Institute on the basis of enrollment capacity, facilities, program breadth, accessibility, and industry linkages, upon the recommendation of the Regional Transition Committee under Section 34 of this Act.

SEC. 9. *Campus Specialization.* — Each constituent campus shall develop a distinct specialization aligned with the priority industries, comparative advantages, and development plans of its province and region, as identified in consultation with the Regional Development Council, industry boards, and the Regional Industry Advisory Council under Section 22 of this Act. Duplication of specializations within an Institute shall be avoided unless justified by demand.

SEC. 10. *Flagship Campuses; Locally-Legislated Polytechnics.* — Any polytechnic institute created by a law of local application, whether enacted before or after the effectivity of this Act, shall constitute, at the option expressed in such law or by the TESDA Board, either the Regional Polytechnic Institute of its region or a flagship campus thereof, retaining the name, identity, and honors conferred by its own charter. Nothing in this Act shall be construed to repeal, diminish, or delay any such law; this Act builds upon them.

ARTICLE III ACADEMIC MANDATE

SEC. 11. *Focus on Higher-Level Qualifications.* — The principal academic mandate of every Institute is the delivery of higher-level qualifications: programs at National Certificate III, IV, and V, and diploma programs under the Philippine Qualifications Framework. Within *five (5)* years from its organization, each Institute shall offer at least *one (1) diploma program and three (3) programs at National Certificate III or higher*, aligned with its regional specializations. Foundational programs may continue during the transition period under Article V.

SEC. 12. *Ladderized Pathways.* — Pursuant to Republic Act No. 10647, otherwise known as the “Ladderized Education Act of 2014,” every program of an Institute shall form part of an explicit qualifications ladder, with credit transfer and embedded exit and re-entry points. Each Institute shall conclude articulation agreements with at least one state university or college in its region to open seamless pathways from diploma to degree.

SEC. 13. *Enterprise-Based Education and Training Hub.* — Each Institute shall serve as the regional hub for Enterprise-Based Education and Training under Republic Act No. 12063, assisting enterprises in registering EBET programs, providing theoretical instruction as a partner training institution, and matching trainees with participating enterprises. Enterprises

partnering with an Institute shall be entitled to the incentives provided under Republic Act No. 12063 and its implementing rules.

SEC. 14. *Centers of Innovation.* — Each Institute may establish Centers of Innovation in fields corresponding to its campus specializations, which shall undertake applied research, technology extension to micro, small, and medium enterprises, and curriculum innovation. Research functions under this Act shall be consolidated under this Section.

SEC. 15. *Recognition of Prior Learning and Flexible Delivery.* — Each Institute shall implement recognition of prior learning, competency-based assessment, micro-credentials, and flexible, blended, or distance delivery modalities in accordance with standards issued by the Authority, and, where applicable, CHED and other competent agencies. Recognition of prior learning shall determine the qualifications, competencies, credits, or exemptions for which an applicant may be eligible. It shall not, by itself, guarantee admission, certification, credit toward a degree, or completion of a program.

SEC. 16. *Equitable and Inclusive Admission.* — Institutes shall adopt transparent and inclusive admission policies that provide priority or appropriate support to qualified applicants from disadvantaged and underrepresented sectors, including children of farmers and fisherfolk, informal-sector workers, indigenous peoples, solo parents and their children, persons with disabilities, out-of-school youth, qualified rebel returnees, and residents of geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.

SEC. 17. *Scholarships and Student Welfare.* — Students of the Institutes shall be entitled to available scholarship and financial assistance programs under existing laws, including the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act where applicable, the Training for Work Scholarship Program, and the Private Education Student Financial Assistance program. Each Institute shall maintain student welfare services, including guidance, career placement, and support for student organizations.

ARTICLE IV GOVERNANCE

SEC. 18. *Board of Trustees.* — Each Institute shall be governed by a Board of Trustees of not more than eleven (11) members: the Director General of the Authority or a duly designated representative, as Chairperson; the Executive Director of the Institute, as Vice-Chairperson; the Regional Directors of the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Department of Labor and Employment in the region; the private sector representative of the Regional Development Council; two (2) representatives of the region's priority industries; one (1) faculty representative; one (1) alumni representative; and one (1) student representative. The compact size of the Board is a deliberate design of this Act and shall not be enlarged by regulation.

SEC. 19. *Powers of the Board.* — The Board shall exercise policy-making and oversight over the Institute, including approval of programs consistent with the standards of the Authority, budgets, organizational structure, campus specializations, and partnerships; and such other powers as are necessary to carry out this Act, consistent with the supervision of the Authority.

SEC. 20. *Executive Director.* — Each Institute shall be headed by an Executive Director with the rank, salary, and privileges of a Director III (Salary Grade 27), appointed by the TESDA

Board from a shortlist prepared by a search committee constituted by the Board of Trustees, on the basis of proven competence in technical education, administration, and industry linkage. The Executive Director shall serve a term of *four (4)* years, renewable once.

SEC. 21. *Campus Chiefs.* — Each constituent campus shall be headed by a Campus Chief with the rank and salary of *Salary Grade 24*. Incumbent administrators or school heads of integrated institutions shall be appointed Campus Chiefs of their respective campuses without need of new application, subject to civil service law.

SEC. 22. *Academic Council; Industry Advisory Council.* — Each Institute shall have an Academic Council composed of its academic personnel, which shall recommend curricular and instructional policies to the Board; and a Regional Industry Advisory Council composed of representatives of the region's employers, industry boards, and workers' organizations, which shall advise on program relevance, EBET partnerships, and employment outcomes.

SEC. 23. *Assessment Independence.* — To preserve the integrity of certification, competency assessment of the students and graduates of an Institute shall be conducted through assessment centers and assessors accredited by the Authority that are organizationally distinct from the delivering campus, under rules the Authority shall issue, so that no Institute assesses solely its own instruction.

ARTICLE V RATIONALIZATION AND DEVOLUTION

SEC. 24. *Rationalization Principle.* — Public provision of technical-vocational education and training shall be rationalized so that the National Government, through the System, concentrates on higher-level qualifications and on programs which local governments and private institutions cannot yet viably deliver, while community-based foundational training is progressively delivered by local government units and registered private providers under the regulation of the Authority.

SEC. 25. *Devolution of Community-Based Training.* — In implementation of Section 29 of Republic Act No. 7796, the Authority shall, in step with the phased organization of the Institutes, transfer the delivery of community-based training programs to provinces, cities, and municipalities that are willing and certified capable under readiness standards the Authority shall promulgate: *Provided*, That every devolution shall be accompanied by the corresponding funds, equipment, and technical assistance, consistent with Republic Act No. 7160: *Provided, further*, That no local government unit shall be compelled to absorb any function without the corresponding resources: *Provided, finally*, That in areas where no capable local government or private provider exists, the Institute shall continue community-based delivery so that no community is left without access.

ARTICLE VI PERSONNEL

SEC. 26. *Absorption; Security of Tenure.* — All incumbent personnel of integrated institutions are hereby absorbed by their respective Institutes without demotion or diminution of salaries, benefits, and privileges. No personnel shall be separated from the service by reason

of the reorganization under this Act. Personnel who elect to transfer with devolved community-based programs shall do so voluntarily and with full protection of tenure and benefits.

SEC. 27. *Compensation and Positions.* — The positions of each Institute shall be organized in accordance with the Compensation and Position Classification System, in coordination with the Department of Budget and Management. Reclassification of positions under this Act shall be released in tranches corresponding to the phased implementation under Section 33.

SEC. 28. *Faculty and Staff Development.* — Each Institute shall maintain a faculty and staff development program, including industry immersion, scholarships for higher qualifications, and training-of-trainers in emerging technologies, with priority given to trainers of campuses acquiring new specializations.

ARTICLE VII RESOURCES

SEC. 29. *Transfer of Assets.* — All lands, buildings, facilities, equipment, records, and obligations of integrated institutions are hereby transferred to their respective Institutes. Lands shall be titled in the name of the Institute for the benefit of the System, subject to existing rights.

SEC. 30. *Income Retention.* — Each Institute is authorized to retain all income from tuition, fees, production, training contracts, and other sources, constituting the same into a special trust fund for instruction, research, facilities, student welfare, and personnel development, subject to government accounting and auditing rules.

SEC. 31. *Donations.* — Donations, contributions, grants, bequests, and gifts to an Institute for educational purposes shall be exempt from donor's tax and shall be deductible from the gross income of the donor in accordance with the National Internal Revenue Code, as amended.

SEC. 32. *Partnerships.* — Each Institute may enter into partnerships with national government agencies, local government units, state universities and colleges, private institutions, and enterprises, including joint training ventures, facilities-sharing, and public-private partnership arrangements consistent with law.

ARTICLE VIII IMPLEMENTATION AND FINAL PROVISIONS

SEC. 33. *Phased Implementation.* — The System shall be organized in tranches of *three (3) to five (5)* regions per year, and completed within *five (5)* years from the effectivity of this Act. The TESDA Board shall determine the sequence of regions by certifying readiness against the following criteria and no others: (a) density and condition of the region's existing campus network; (b) enrollment base and projected demand; (c) priority-industry demand as validated by the Regional Development Council; (d) availability of a viable main campus; and (e) organizational preparations completed by the Regional Transition Committee. The certification and its basis shall be published.

SEC. 34. *Regional Transition Committees.* — Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Authority shall constitute in each region a Regional Transition Committee composed of the TESDA Regional Director as chairperson, the heads of the institutions to be integrated, and representatives of the Regional Development Council, faculty, and students, which shall prepare the integration plan, the main-campus recommendation, the specialization map, and the devolution schedule of its region. Each Committee is dissolved upon the organization of its Institute's Board of Trustees.

SEC. 35. *Relationship to the Charter of the Authority.* — The System shall operate under Republic Act No. 7796 and, upon the enactment of any law amending, modernizing, or replacing the charter of the Authority, under such law, without need of amendment to this Act. References in this Act to the Authority, the TESDA Board, or the Director General shall be understood to refer to their successors in function.

SEC. 36. *Congressional Oversight; Reports.* — The Authority shall submit to the President and to both Houses of Congress, not later than June 30 of every year, a report on the implementation of this Act, including per-region enrollment by qualification level, completion and certification rates, employment outcomes of graduates, the progress of devolution under Section 25, and recommendations. The appropriate congressional oversight or education commission may review the implementation of this Act.

SEC. 37. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Authority, in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Commission on Higher Education, the leagues of local governments, and industry and labor representatives, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations of this Act: *Provided*, That Sections 6, 7, 26, and 29 are self-executing and shall not be delayed by the non-issuance of such rules.

SEC. 38. *Appropriations.* — The amount of *two billion five hundred million pesos (P2,500,000,000.00)* is hereby appropriated for the initial implementation of this Act, chargeable against the unprogrammed and available funds of the National Treasury. Thereafter, the amounts necessary for each implementation tranche, including the operation of organized Institutes and the funded devolution under Section 25, shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. No function shall be transferred under this Act without the corresponding funds.

SEC. 39. *Transitory Provision.* — Pending the organization of an Institute, all integrated institutions shall continue to operate under their existing arrangements, and no program, enrollment, or scholarship shall be interrupted by reason of this Act.

SEC. 40. *Separability Clause.* — If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall continue in full force and effect.

SEC. 41. *Repealing Clause.* — All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly: *Provided*, That charters of institutions integrated under Section 7 are amended only to the extent of such integration, and all honors, names, and benefits therein are preserved.

SEC. 42. *Effectivity.* — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,