

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Constitution Hills, Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **11353**



Introduced by: **REPRESENTATIVE ERIC L. OLIVAREZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects many Filipino individuals and families who continue to face significant challenges in accessing timely developmental screening, diagnosis, intervention, therapy, healthcare, education, and community support services. These challenges are compounded by the limited availability of specialized facilities and trained professionals, financial barriers, and unequal access to developmental services, particularly in underserved and geographically disadvantaged areas.

This proposed measure seeks to establish a nationwide network of accessible and affordable Autism Centers that will serve as regional hubs for developmental screening, diagnostic assessment, intervention, rehabilitation, family support, educational coordination, and referral services. It likewise seeks to strengthen early detection and intervention by integrating developmental screening into existing health and community-based programs and by training frontline healthcare, education, and community personnel to recognize developmental concerns and facilitate timely referrals.

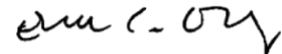
The measure further promotes inclusive education and community support, strengthens the capacity of healthcare professionals, therapists, educators, and other service providers, and encourages research and data-driven policymaking to improve the availability, quality, accessibility, and affordability of autism-related services.

Recognizing that timely and continuous support is essential to improving outcomes, the bill provides for coordinated referral mechanisms among Autism Centers and relevant healthcare, education, social welfare, skills training, and employment institutions. It also encourages the expansion of appropriate health coverage and financial assistance for indigent and financially vulnerable families.

Consistent with Republic Act No. 7277, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta for Persons with Disability,” as amended, Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act,” Republic Act No. 11223, otherwise known as the “Universal Health Care Act,” Republic Act No. 11650, otherwise known as the “Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act,” and other relevant laws, this measure adopts a rights-based, inclusive, family-centered, community-based, and evidence-informed approach to autism care and support.

By establishing accessible Autism Centers and strengthening early detection, referral, intervention, and support systems nationwide, this measure seeks to reduce disparities in access to services and enable persons with ASD and their families to receive timely, appropriate, and continuing support regardless of their place of residence or economic circumstances.

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



ERIC L. OLIVAREZ

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**“AN ACT
ESTABLISHING AUTISM CENTERS AND EARLY
DETECTION PROGRAMS NATIONWIDE, PROVIDING
FUNDS THEREFOR, 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
“National Autism Care and Support Act.”

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby declared the
policy of the State to protect and promote the rights, dignity, inclusion,
and well-being of persons with disabilities, including persons with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), consistent with the Constitution,
Republic Act No. 7277, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta for
Persons with Disability,” as amended, Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise
known as the “Mental Health Act,” Republic Act No. 11223, otherwise
known as the “Universal Health Care Act,” Republic Act No. 11650,
otherwise known as the “Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services
for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act,” and
other relevant laws.

The State shall adopt a comprehensive, inclusive, family-centered,
community-based, and evidence-informed approach to autism care and
support through accessible screening, early detection, intervention,
healthcare, education, rehabilitation, skills development, employment
support, and social inclusion programs for persons with ASD and their
families.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. - For purposes of this Act, the
following terms are hereby defined:

- a) “*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*” refers to a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent differences in social communication and social interaction, patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, sensory processing differences, and varying levels of support needs;
- b) “*Autism Centers*” refer to specialized facilities or designated units within healthcare institutions that provide developmental screening, diagnostic assessment, referral, therapy, rehabilitation, family support, educational coordination, and community-based services for persons with ASD;
- c) “*Early Detection and Intervention Program*” refers to a coordinated system of developmental screening, assessment, referral, and evidence-informed intervention and support services designed to identify developmental concerns and facilitate timely access to appropriate services;
- d) “*Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder*” refer to individuals diagnosed with ASD who may require varying levels of support and services; and
- e) “*Individualized Education Plan (IEP)*” refers to a learner-centered educational support plan designed to address the specific developmental, behavioral, communication, and learning needs of a learner with ASD, consistent with applicable laws, policies, and regulations on inclusive education.

SECTION 4. Establishment of Regional Autism Centers. - The Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with local government units (LGUs), government hospitals, state universities and colleges (SUCs), and qualified and accredited non-government organizations (NGOs), shall establish or designate at least one (1) Autism Center in every region.

Priority shall be given to underserved and geographically disadvantaged areas, including geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs).

The Autism Centers shall provide accessible and affordable services, including:

- a) Developmental screening, diagnostic assessment, and referral services;

- b) Occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, behavioral and developmental interventions, physical therapy, psychosocial support, and other appropriate interventions;
- c) Parent, caregiver, and family counseling, education, and training;
- d) Educational assessment and IEP support in coordination with schools and the Department of Education (DepEd);
- e) Community-based rehabilitation and support services; and
- f) Referral and coordination with healthcare providers, social welfare agencies, educational institutions, skills training institutions, and employment support programs.

The DOH may accredit existing qualified public or private facilities as Autism Centers, subject to standards, requirements, and accreditation guidelines established pursuant to this Act.

The DOH shall establish a referral and coordination mechanism among Autism Centers to facilitate continuity of care and access to appropriate services.

SECTION 5. National Early Detection and Intervention Program. - The DOH, in coordination with the DepEd, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), LGUs, and other relevant agencies, shall establish a nationwide Early Detection and Intervention Program for ASD.

The Program shall:

- a) Integrate developmental screening and, when appropriate, autism-related screening or risk assessment into existing maternal, child health, and other appropriate public health programs;
- b) Train barangay health workers, nurses, midwives, pediatricians, teachers, daycare workers, and other community-based healthcare and education personnel to recognize developmental delays and indicators associated with ASD and to facilitate appropriate referrals;
- c) Establish clear and accessible referral pathways for children requiring further developmental assessment, diagnosis, intervention, or support;

- d) Facilitate timely access to evidence-informed interventions and support services, particularly for children in underserved and geographically disadvantaged areas; and
- e) Conduct nationwide information, education, communication, and anti-stigma campaigns promoting autism awareness, inclusion, early detection, and access to appropriate services.

Developmental screening under this Act shall respect parental participation, informed consent, child rights, and applicable privacy and confidentiality laws.

SECTION 6. Inclusive Education and Community Support. -

Consistent with Republic Act No. 11650 and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations, the DepEd, in coordination with the DOH, Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), LGUs, and other relevant agencies, shall strengthen inclusive education and community support systems for learners and individuals with ASD by:

- a) Expanding access to Special Education (SPED) and inclusive education programs;
- b) Providing training for teachers, guidance counselors, and school personnel on autism inclusion, classroom accommodations, and learner support strategies;
- c) Developing inclusive learning materials and reasonable accommodation guidelines;
- d) Supporting transition programs for adolescents and young adults with ASD toward higher education, skills training, employment, and independent living; and
- e) Promoting autism-friendly schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

LGUs and communities are encouraged to establish support networks and inclusive community programs for persons with ASD and their families and to coordinate with Autism Centers in providing appropriate referral and support services.

SECTION 7. Capacity Building and Workforce Development. -

The DOH, Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), CHED, TESDA, and relevant professional organizations shall:

- a) Develop and strengthen training, certification, fellowship, and continuing professional education programs related to autism care, developmental services, and evidence-informed interventions;
- b) Encourage the expansion of developmental and behavioral healthcare specialization and training programs;
- c) Provide or facilitate scholarships, grants, incentives, or return-service programs for healthcare workers, therapists, educators, and other qualified specialists who serve or commit to serving underserved and geographically disadvantaged areas; and
- d) Promote interdisciplinary and community-based approaches to autism care and support.

SECTION 8. Research, Data Management, and Policy Development. - The DOH, in coordination with the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), academic institutions, and relevant government agencies, shall:

- a) Establish and maintain a national autism database and information system for program planning, service delivery, monitoring, and research, consistent with Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the 'Data Privacy Act of 2012,' and other applicable laws;
- b) Support research on autism prevalence, early detection, intervention outcomes, inclusive education, mental health, employment, and family and community support systems;
- c) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility, affordability, and regional coverage of autism-related services and programs; and
- d) Develop evidence-informed policies and recommendations to improve autism care, inclusion, and support.

Personal information collected and processed pursuant to this Act shall be protected in accordance with applicable data privacy, confidentiality, and child protection laws.

SECTION 9. Financial Accessibility and Health Coverage. - The DOH and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) shall endeavor to improve access to affordable developmental, diagnostic,

therapeutic, rehabilitative, and appropriate mental health services for persons with ASD, consistent with existing laws and available resources.

The government shall encourage the inclusion and expansion of appropriate ASD-related benefit packages under PhilHealth and other public healthcare financing mechanisms, subject to applicable laws, rules, regulations, and actuarial requirements.

Indigent and financially vulnerable families shall be prioritized for subsidized services and other appropriate forms of government assistance.

SECTION 10. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual appropriations of the DOH and participating agencies under the General Appropriations Act.

LGUs may allocate counterpart funding, facilities, personnel, equipment, and logistical support for the implementation of this Act.

The Program may also receive grants, donations, and development assistance from lawful domestic or international sources, subject to existing laws, rules, and regulations.

SECTION 11. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability. - The DOH shall establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of this Act and shall submit an annual report to Congress and the Office of the President containing:

- a) The number and geographic distribution of Autism Centers established or accredited;
- b) The coverage of developmental screening, diagnostic referral, intervention, and support services;
- c) The availability and geographic distribution of trained professionals and support personnel;
- d) Budget utilization and program outcomes;
- e) The accessibility and affordability of services; and
- f) Challenges encountered, recommendations, and proposed policy improvements.

Periodic independent program reviews may likewise be conducted to assess the effectiveness and impact of the programs established under this Act.

SECTION 12. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, in coordination with the DepEd, DSWD, CHED, TESDA, PRC, PhilHealth, LGUs, autism advocacy organizations, healthcare professionals, educators, and other relevant stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations to carry out the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 13. Separability Clause. - If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 14. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules, and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 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.