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SENATE
S.B. No. 2118

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Introduced by: Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" A. Aquino IV

AN ACT
DECLARING FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE AS THE NATIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE OF THE
FILIPINO DEAF AND THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF GOVERNMENT IN ALL TRANSACTIONS
INVOLVING THE DEAF, AND MANDATING ITS USE IN SCHOOLS, BROADCAST MEDIA,
AND WORKPLACES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Have you ever had a dream where you were screaming for help and nobody could hear you?

For the over half a million members¹ of the Filipino Deaf community, scenarios like this are not just a dream or a nightmare—they are part of their everyday reality. Because much of society does not naturally understand the culture of the Filipino Deaf, or are equipped to do so, many Deaf individuals are left without proper communication or access to information.

Worse, because of this large communication gap, Deaf individuals have become more vulnerable to abuse. According to data shared by the Cebu-based non-government organization Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc., up to 70 percent of Deaf boys and girls "are being molested"², while 63 percent are being "abused by their own fathers."³ Their data also shows that one out of three Deaf women has been raped.⁴

In order to build a safer and more inclusive society for the Filipino Deaf community, government, civil society, academe, and the private sector must work together to give Deaf individuals access to communication, information, and tools that are necessary to lead productive lives. Thus, this representation appeals for the urgent passage of the **Filipino Sign Language (FSL) Act of 2014**, which shall declare Filipino Sign Language as the national sign language of the Filipino Deaf and the official language of the Philippine government in all transactions with the Deaf, and which shall likewise mandate the use of FSL in schools, workplaces, and broadcast media.

¹ Based on 2009 estimates by the National Statistical Office (NSO), sourced from a presentation by the Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc, February 2014.

² Data from the Philippine Deaf Resource Center, sourced from a presentation by the Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc, February 2014.

³ De Guzman, 2002, sourced from a presentation by the Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc, February 2014.

⁴ Lyer and Fortunato, 2005, sourced from a presentation by the Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc, February 2014.

Such a language would not only produce highly successful learners, it would also respect the Filipino Deaf community's rights to identity, access to education, and direct communication, among others.


Moreover, this Act provides for FSL to be the medium of official communication in all transactions involving the Deaf and the language of instruction of Deaf education. It shall also be the official language of legal interpreting for the Deaf in all public hearings, proceedings, and transactions of the courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and other tribunals, as well as in all public and private workplaces, and in all other public transactions, services, and facilities.

To make information more accessible in broadcast media, this Act also requires FSL interpreter insets in news and public affairs programs. Subsequently, the NTC shall take steps to promote the use of FSL in all other broadcasts and programming.

Under this proposed Act, the National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA), with the involvement of the Deaf community and other stakeholders, shall establish a national system of standards, accreditation, and procedures for FSL interpreting. Likewise, the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and other national and local agencies shall take appropriate steps to propagate sign language competency among hearing people, by offering FSL as an optional language subject in the regular or mainstream curriculum, among others.

We fervently believe that a humane, just, and inclusive society protects the vulnerable, integrates the marginalized, breaks down the barriers of discrimination, and gives equal access to opportunity for every Filipino. Mandating and promoting the use of FSL, we believe, is a step toward social justice for the Filipino Deaf community.

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


Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" A. Aquino IV



SIXTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)

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

1 **Section 1. Title.** This Act shall be known as "*The Filipino Sign Language Act of*
2 *2014*"

3 **Section 2. Declaration of Policy.** The State shall promote, protect, and ensure the
4 full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of
5 persons with disabilities. Thus, national and local state agencies shall uphold
6 respect for their inherent dignity, individual autonomy, and independence by
7 guaranteeing accessibility and eliminating all forms of discrimination in all public
8 interactions and transactions, thereby ensuring their full and effective
9 participation and inclusion in society.

10 The State shall also take all appropriate measures to ensure that the Filipino
11 Deaf can exercise the right to expression and opinion. Accordingly, the State
12 recognizes and promotes the use of sign languages embodying the specific
13 cultural and linguistic identity of the Filipino Deaf. Filipino Deaf children can
14 learn best and most comfortably and effectively in an environment that
15 recognizes and respects who they are, one that uses their native first
16 language—a true visual language, which is a system historically and distinctively
17 their own. Such a language would not only produce highly successful learners
18 but would also respect their rights to identity, access to education, and direct
19 communication, among others.

20 **Section 3. Filipino Sign Language as the National Sign Language of the Filipino**
21 **Deaf.** Filipino Sign Language, hereinafter referred to as FSL, is hereby declared as

1 the national sign language of the Philippines. As such, it shall be used as the
2 medium of official communication in all transactions involving the Deaf and the
3 language of instruction of Deaf education.

4 **Section 4. Filipino Sign Language in Education.**

5 **a. Medium of Instruction and Curriculum.** The Department of Education
6 (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education
7 and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and all other national and
8 local government agencies involved in the education of the Deaf, are
9 tasked to henceforth use FSL as the medium of instruction in Deaf
10 education. The FSL shall also be taught a separate subject in the
11 curriculum for Deaf learners. The reading and writing of Filipino, as the
12 national spoken language, other Philippine languages, and English shall
13 also be taught to Deaf learners.

14 **b. FSL in Early Childhood Care.** All early childhood care and development
15 programs provided by the government shall enable age-adequate FSL
16 acquisition to pre-school age Deaf children and their families.

17 **c. Deaf Teachers.** To promote the licensing of Deaf teachers who use
18 FSL, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) is directed to
19 employ affirmative action measures by administering alternative
20 assessment procedures which shall consider the conditions and
21 abilities of the Deaf and be language-appropriate and culture-fair to
22 Deaf education graduates.

23 In the hiring and deployment of teachers in formal and non-formal
24 education programs, DepEd and all other concerned national and local
25 agencies are directed to employ affirmative action in recruiting Deaf
26 persons who use FSL.

27 **d. FSL in Teacher Training Programs for Deaf Education.** FSL shall be included
28 as a separate subject in the curriculum of training programs for teachers in
29 Deaf education.

30 **e. Training and Evaluation Programs.** To improve the quality of teachers
31 in Deaf education, all national and local government agencies,
32 centers, and programs providing education to Deaf students, are
33 hereby tasked to institute periodic training and evaluation programs
34 for their teachers. Training and evaluation shall be designed and
35 taught in consultation with the representatives of the Filipino Deaf
36 community.

1 **Section 5. *Standards for Filipino Sign Language Interpreting.*** The National
2 Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA), with the involvement of the Deaf
3 community and other stakeholders, shall establish a national system of
4 standards, accreditation, and procedures for FSL interpreting.

5 **Section 6. *Filipino Sign Language in Courts, Quasi-Judicial Agencies, and Other***
6 ***Tribunals.*** FSL shall be the official language of legal interpreting for the Deaf in all
7 public hearings, proceedings, and transactions of the courts, quasi-judicial
8 agencies, and other tribunals. To ensure effective access to justice for the Deaf on
9 an equal basis with others and to facilitate their effective role as direct and
10 indirect participants in the legal system, courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and other
11 tribunals are hereby mandated to ensure the availability of FSL interpreting in all
12 proceedings involving the Deaf.

13 For purposes of this Act, "hearings, proceedings, and transactions" shall include
14 those in police stations and the *Lupong Tagapamayapa*, as well as preliminary
15 investigations and other initial stages in the courts, quasi-judicial bodies, and
16 other tribunals.

17 The Supreme Court and other concerned agencies shall promote appropriate
18 training for those working in the administration of justice, including hearing
19 and Deaf relay interpreters, and other court personnel, and police and prison
20 staff.

21 The NCDA, the Department of Justice, and the Judiciary, with the involvement
22 of the Deaf community and other stakeholders, are tasked to create a
23 national system of standards, accreditation, and procedures for legal
24 interpreting in FSL.

25 **Section 7. *Filipino Sign Language in All Workplaces.*** FSL shall be the official language of
26 the Filipino Deaf employed in the public and private service. For this purpose, every
27 government office shall take all reasonable measures that would encourage the use of
28 FSL among its Deaf and hearing employees, including the conduct of awareness and
29 training seminars on the rationale and use of FSL:

30 **Section 8. *Filipino Sign Language in the Public Health System.*** State hospitals and
31 health centers shall take steps to ensure access of the Filipino Deaf to health services,
32 including the free provision of FSL interpreters for Deaf patients.

33 **Section 9. *Filipino Sign Language in All Other Public Transactions, Services, and***
34 ***Facilities.*** As the medium of official communication, all national and local
35 government agencies are hereby directed to use FSL in all public transactions
36 involving the Deaf. FSL interpreting shall be provided whenever necessary or
37 requested in all government offices and during forums, conferences, meetings,

1 cultural events, sports competitions, community affairs, and activities conducted
2 by government agencies.

3 **Section 10. *Filipino Sign Language in Broadcast Media.*** FSL shall be the official
4 language of broadcast media interpreting. To guarantee access to information
5 and freedom of expression of the Filipino Deaf, the National Telecommunications
6 Commission (NTC) shall, within a reasonable period upon the effective date of
7 this Act, require FSL interpreter insets in news and public affairs programs.
8 Subsequently, the NTC shall take steps to promote the use of FSL in all other
9 broadcasts and programming.

10 The NTC, in consultation with the NCDA, Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng
11 Pilipinas, the Deaf community, and other stakeholders, is tasked to create a
12 national system of standards, procedures and accreditation for broadcast
13 media interpreting in FSL.

14 **Section 11. *Promotion of FSL.*** The DepEd, CHED, and other national and local agencies
15 shall take appropriate steps to propagate sign language competency among hearing
16 people, by offering FSL as an optional language subject in the regular or mainstream
17 curriculum, among others.

18 State universities and colleges are directed to undertake continuing research for the
19 development, propagation, and preservation of FSL.

20 **Section 12. *Implementing Rules.*** The DepEd, CHED, TESDA, PRC, NCDA, Supreme
21 Court, DOJ, and other relevant agencies shall, within 30 days after its effective
22 date, promulgate the necessary rules and regulations. For this purpose, these
23 agencies shall involve representatives of the Deaf community, teachers with
24 knowledge and experience in the use of FSL in Deaf education, the academe,
25 and other persons concerned. These rules and regulations shall likewise be
26 published in accessible formats in their respective websites and through other
27 means necessary.

28 **Section 13. *Monitoring of the Implementation of this Act.*** The NCDA, in
29 collaboration with representatives of the Deaf community, is hereby tasked to
30 convene an Inter-Agency Committee including individuals and institutions with
31 knowledge and experience on FSL and its use, to make an annual assessment of
32 the implementation of this Act. The report of this Inter-Agency Committee shall
33 be transmitted annually to the House Committee on Basic Education and Culture
34 and Senate Committee on Education, Arts, and Culture and published in
35 accessible formats in their respective websites and through other means
36 necessary.

1 **Section 14. Appropriations.** Implementation of this Act shall derive its funding
2 from the 1% appropriations for Persons with Disabilities as provided in the
3 General Appropriations Act.

4 **Section 15. Repealing Clause.** All laws and executive issuances inconsistent with the
5 provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

6 **Section 16. Separability Clause.** If any provision of this Act is declared
7 unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectiveness of its other
8 provisions.

9 **Section 17. Effectivity.** This Act shall take effect fifteen days after its publication in the
10 *Official Gazette* or one newspaper of general circulation.

11 Approved,