

SENATE

S. No. 3102

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Introduced by Senator Manuel "Lito" M. Lapid

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article 13, Section 12 of the 1987 Constitution provides that the State shall undertake appropriate health manpower development and research, responsive to the country's health needs and problems.

In line with this vision, one of the areas which needs comprehensive research, study and information dissemination campaign is the disease called "amblyopia". Amblyopia, as manifested in the decrease in visual acuity, is a health problem that develops early in life during the critical period of visual development. Amblyopia, often called "*lazy eye*," is a decrease in visual acuity resulting from abnormal visual development in infancy and early childhood. The vision loss in amblyopia ranges from mild (worse than 20/25) to severe (legal blindness, 20/200 or worse). Although generally unilateral, amblyopia may affect both eyes. It is the most common cause of monocular vision loss in children and young adults. It is caused by any abnormal visual experience early in life due to strabismus (squint), uncorrected refractive error or visual deprivation.

Medical experts submit that early recognition of amblyogenic risk factors such as strabismus, refractive errors, and anatomic obstructions can facilitate the early treatment and increase the chance of recovery of visual acuity. Early recognition and prompt referral are crucial, especially during infancy and childhood, to prevent permanent loss of vision. Various medical experts endorse screening for visual abnormalities in children and young adults, yet this procedure is not being included in the new born screening procedures being promoted by the Department of Health (DOH) and implemented by the various health service delivery system in our country. Amblyopia, depending on the severity, may be reversible if the underlying causes are identified and amblyopia treatment is started early.

This proposed measure seeks to provide a comprehensive program for health research on the disease called "amblyopia" and provide a national comprehensive information and education drive to inform the general public of the disorder.

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



MANUEL "LITO" M. LAPID
Senator

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AN ACT

ESTABLISHING A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION CAMPAIGN ON AMBLYOPIA AND REQUIRING THE MANDATORY INCLUSION OF VISUAL SCREENING TESTS ON AMBLYOPIA IN THE NATIONAL NEWBORN SCREENING COVERAGE, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9288, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "NEWBORN SCREENING ACT OF 2004" AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

SECTION 1. Short Title. - This Act shall be known as the *"Mainstreaming Amblyopia Act of 2009."*

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people to full, healthy and holistic development and the right to self-determination. As such, the State shall promote an environment conducive to the development of all its citizens to become, to the best of their potentials, independent, self-reliant and productive members of society.

Towards this end, the State commits itself to the establishment of institutional mechanisms to provide a comprehensive information, education and communication campaign on Amblyopia in order to address this health concern.

In pursuit of such policy, the State shall also institutionalize the inclusion of visual screening test of amblyopia in its national newborn screening system in order to proactively address said disease.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. - For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

(a) **"Amblyopia"**, is a health problem that develops early in life during the critical period of visual development. Amblyopia, often called *"lazy eye,"* is a decrease

in visual acuity resulting from abnormal visual development in infancy and early childhood. The vision loss in amblyopia ranges from mild (worse than 20/25) to severe (legal blindness, 20/200 or worse). Although generally unilateral, amblyopia may affect both eyes. It is the most common cause of monocular vision loss in children and young adults. It is caused by any abnormal visual experience early in life due to strabismus (squint), uncorrected refractive error or visual deprivation.

- (b) “*Department*” shall refer to the Department of Health;
- (c) “*Secretary*” shall refer to the Secretary of the Department of Health.

SEC. 4. Section 4 (1) of Republic Act No. 9288, otherwise known as the “***Newborn Screening Act of 2004***” is hereby amended to read as follows:

1) *Comprehensive Newborn Screening System* means a newborn screening system that includes, but is not limited to, education of relevant stakeholders; collection and biochemical screening of blood samples taken from newborns; **PROVISION OF VISUAL SCREENING TESTS ON AMBLYOPIA**; tracking and confirmatory testing to ensure the accuracy of screening results; clinical evaluation and biochemical/medical confirmation of test results; drugs and medical/surgical management and dietary supplementation to address the heritable conditions; and evaluation activities to assess long term outcome, patient compliance and quality assurance.

SEC. 5. *Comprehensive Research on Amblyopia.* - The Secretary of the Department of Health is hereby mandated to conduct a comprehensive research and information drive on the incidence of Amblyopia in the country. The Department is also mandated to support medical and epidemiological research activities to expand the knowledge and understanding of the said disorder in the country.

The Department is mandated to strengthen its research focus concerning Amblyopia, including a renewed investment into basic and clinical research, expanded research into the link between environmental factors and the disease, and continued investigations into causation, diagnosis, early detection and treatment for the same. Such factors that will be studied shall also include, among others, hormones and reproductive factors, genetic factors, socio-demographic factors, and others.

SEC. 6. *Appropriations.* - The funds necessary to implement the provisions of this Act shall be incorporated in the annual general appropriations of the Department of Health.

SEC. 7. *Separability Clause* - If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 8. *Repealing Clause* - Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with the provision of this act is hereby repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

SEC. 9. *Effectivity Clause*. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days from the date of its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,