

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)

'18 FEB 26 P 4 :34

SENATE

S.B. No. 1706

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator **SONNY ANGARA**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL VISION SCREENING PROGRAM FOR
KINDERGARTEN PUPILS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The vision of young children, particularly those at a preschool age, plays a crucial role in their development, as their sight is a primary guide to most of their learning experiences. It is clear that good and healthy visual skills are fundamental to bolster a child's literacy. According to the American Public Health Association, about 10% of all preschoolers have eye or vision problems, but children at this age cannot identify these disorders.

In the Philippines, four (4) students in a class of 40 have a vision problem according to the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI); three of them may have error of refraction and one may have amblyopia or lazy eye. Amblyopia has a prevalence of 2 to 5% in children, making it one of the causes of visual impairment and preventable blindness. While the disorder is common among children, it can cause permanent visual impairment if left untreated. With the full implementation of the K-to-12 program, preschool entry for public school system now starts earlier at the age of 5 or 6. Vision screening done at this age would allow early detection of amblyopia, if not treated, will lead to education, occupational and safety restrictions later in life.

Therefore, it is only proper to establish an early diagnostic initiative for young children. This Bill institutionalizes a nationwide screening program conducted by the DepEd for kindergarten pupils. According to the Harvard Medical School, the causes of lazy eye must be identified and treated as early as possible during childhood. A holistic approach must be undertaken for the benefit of every child's cognitive development to ensure their success in education.

This Act advances a health policy grounded on early preventive intervention that is more efficient than remediation at a later age. Hence, the approval of this measure is earnestly sought.



SONNY ANGARA



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

1 **SECTION 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the "National Vision
2 Screening Act."

3 **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – Pursuant to Article II, Section 15 of the 1987
4 Philippine Constitution, it is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and
5 promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among
6 them. In line with this policy, the State shall endeavor to promote every Filipino's full
7 potential through good vision by creating ways and means to address vision
8 problems, including blindness, among children.

9 Towards this end, the State shall institute a program that will help screen the
10 school children for visual problems.

11 **SEC. 3. Establishment of a National Vision Screening Program.** – A
12 National Vision Screening Program (NVSP) is hereby established under the
13 Department of Education (DepED) which is primarily intended to screen the eye
14 vision of kindergarten pupils.

1 **SEC. 4. Program Objectives.** – The objectives of the NVSP are:

- 2 a) To conduct simple vision screening tests on kindergarten pupils
3 through trained teachers and identify pupils with possible visual
4 problems;
5 b) To identify early childhood visual problems;
6 c) To provide immediate attention to visually impaired kindergarten pupils
7 and create a referral system so that they may be checked and treated
8 by eye care practitioners;
9 d) To develop a vision screening results database for all kindergarten
10 pupils; and
11 e) To conduct continuing research on the state of visual impairment
12 among kindergarten pupils.

13 **SEC. 5. Program Implementation.** – The DepED shall lead the
14 implementation of the NVSP, in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH)
15 and the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI), which is under the National
16 Institutes of Health of the University of the Philippines (UP).

17 In the implementation of the NVSP, the DepED shall:

- 18 a) In coordination with the DOH and the PERI, administer the vision
19 screening program to all public kindergarten pupils using a Vision
20 Screening Kit which includes charts with symbols or numbers, occluders,
21 and transparent response key: *Provided*, That the DOH and PERI may
22 recommend to adopt new modes or methods of vision screening based on
23 the latest trends and developments;
24 b) In coordination with the DOH and PERI, train and certify teachers in
25 conducting the vision screening program;
26 c) In consultation with the DOH and PERI, develop a system of referral and
27 corrective measures for kindergarten pupils who are suspected or
28 diagnosed to have possible eye ailments;
29 d) Create a vision screening database containing the results of the screening
30 per child and visual conditions diagnosed by the eye care practitioners;
31 and

1 e) Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NVSP.

2 **SEC. 6. *PhilHealth Benefit Package.*** – The Philippine Health Insurance
3 Corporation (PhilHealth) shall develop a benefit package for the consultation and
4 treatment of eye diseases of children.

5 **SEC. 7. *Vision Screening Training.*** – The PERI shall be mainly responsible
6 for training of Vision Screening Trainers for purposes of quality assurance. It shall
7 likewise recommend the appropriate Vision Screening material to be used.

8 **SEC. 8. *Research.*** – The DOH and PERI shall conduct research and provide
9 evidence-based recommendations to the DepED on matters pertaining to the NVSP.
10 Furthermore, the PERI shall perform continuing research on childhood related eye
11 vision ailments.

12 **SEC. 9. *The Vision Screening Continuing Research Fund.*** – There is
13 hereby created a Vision Screening Continuing Research (VSCR) Fund to be sourced
14 from any donation or bequest made to the DepED or DOH in favor of the NVSP
15 which shall be subject to existing budgeting, accounting and auditing rules and
16 regulations. The VSCR Fund shall be used to fund the PERI for its continuing
17 research program in connection with childhood related eye vision ailments.

18 **SEC. 10. *Tax Exemption.*** – All grants, bequests, endowments, donations and
19 contributions made to the DepED, DOH, or PERI for the NVSP and for the VSCR
20 Fund to be used actually, directly and exclusively by the DepED, DOH, or PERI for
21 the NVSP and for the VSCR Fund shall be exempt from donor's tax and the same
22 shall be allowed as allowable deduction from the gross income of the donor for
23 purposes of computing the taxable income of the donor in accordance with the
24 provisions of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended.

1 **SEC. 11. Appropriations.** – The amount necessary to cover the
2 implementation of this Act for public kindergarten pupils shall be included in the
3 budgets of the DepED and DOH in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).
4 However, for kindergarten pupils enrolled in private schools, the funding for the
5 implementation of their respective school's vision screening program shall be
6 assumed by the private schools concerned.

7 **SEC. 12. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – Within ninety (90) days
8 from the approval of this Act, the DepED, in consultation with the DOH, PERI and
9 other participating government agencies, shall formulate the implementing rules and
10 regulations of this Act.

11 **SEC. 13. Separability Clause.** – If any provision of this Act is held invalid or
12 unconstitutional, the other provisions not so declared shall remain in force and effect.

13 **SEC. 14. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations
14 contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or
15 amended accordingly.

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

Approved,