


THIRTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Third Regular Session)

6 SEP 25 P5:22

SENATE

S. B. No. 2473

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Manuel "Lito" M. Lapid

EXPLANATORY NOTE

To date, hidden among the 88 million people and the 7100 islands of the Philippines, are an estimated more than 600,000 people who are blind, and many more who are visually impaired to a lesser degree. By far, the leading cause of blindness among adults in the Philippines is cataract, accounting for around 550,000 cases. The treatment for cataract is simple and effective but is not readily available or affordable for those living in the rural areas.

Studies indicate that 100 children lose their sight every week in the Philippines. Sadly, almost half of these cases are either treatable or preventable. Poor nutrition, measles and premature birth are among the leading causes of preventable blindness in children in the country. Studies further indicate that early detection and treatment can save the sight of most of these children, which is why there is an urgent need to improve the skills of our health providers so that we can better prevent the occurrence of sight loss and visual impairment problem in the country.

The National Survey of Blindness conducted on June 1995 indicate that the prevalence of bilateral blindness in Filipinos is 0.7%, meaning that there are 478,968 out of 68.4 million Filipinos who are blind by World Health Organization (WHO) definition or is unable to count fingers at 3 meters. This would mean that there are about 616,000 Filipinos today who are blind based on the 88 million current population for 2006.

From a global perspective, many people do not know that every five seconds, one person in the world goes blind. Moreover, there are 45 million people all over the world who are blind and there are 124 million more people with significant loss of vision. Studies further indicate that eighty percent (80%) of blindness incidence in the world is avoidable: twenty percent (20%) is preventable and sixty percent (60%) is treatable. Moreover, ninety percent (90%) of the world's blind people live in developing countries. Additionally, the WHO estimates that the number of blind and visually impaired people in the world will double by 2020 unless concerted action is taken by the various countries affected by this problem.

The loss of sight deprives a person with a wide horizon of opportunities for economic undertaking in order to become an economically productive citizen. This situation limits the person's mobility and prospects for employment. Moreover, sight loss deprives a person with the ability to nurture and nourish the colorful beauty of life and the magnificent existence.

The restoration of sight and the prevention of blindness, therefore, is a noble endeavor in promoting the holistic health and total well-being of the citizens of this nation.


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


MANUEL "LITO" M. LAPID
Senator 

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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR THE ENABLING MECHANISMS FOR THE PREVENTION
OF SIGHT AND VISUAL IMPAIREDNESS IN THE COUNTRY 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 "*Blindness Prevention Act of 2006*".

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote the right to health and health consciousness of its people. Towards this end, the State shall provide the enabling mechanisms to help promote the prevention of the increasing incidence and prevalence of sight loss and visual impairment problem in the country.

SEC. 3. Mainstreaming Blindness Prevention in the National Health Agenda. - In order to provide an impact in addressing the increasing incidence and prevalence of sight loss and visual impairment in the country, the Department of Health (DOH), in consultation with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), is hereby tasked to formulate a Strategic Plan, Time-Bound Implementation Plan and Action Plan which will mainstream the issue of blindness and visual impairment prevention in the Long-Term and Medium-Term Health Development Plan of the country.

SEC. 4. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Campaign on Blindness Prevention. - The DOH, in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), National Council for the Welfare of Children (NCWC) and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), shall conduct year-round

information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns against blindness and visual impairment problems.

The year-round information, education and communication (IEC) campaign, shall include, among others:

- (a) guidelines on the various measures in the prevention of sight loss;
- (b) the raising public awareness of the importance of vision as a basic human right;
- (c) the dissemination of publications and other resources on the prevention of blindness;
- (d) information on educational initiatives and programs for the prevention of sight loss; and
- (e) the raising of public awareness on the need to detect and correct early any visual impairment during childhood development.

SEC. 5. *LGU Participation in Community-Based Services.* — The local government units, in coordination and in cooperation with concerned government agencies and non-government organizations, shall provide and implement community-based blindness prevention programs and care services to their constituents.

SEC. 6. *Annual National Conference on Blindness Prevention.* - The DOH, in coordination with the DSWD, NCWC and PIA, is hereby mandated to conduct an Annual Blindness Prevention National Conference which will be participated by the different stakeholders in the health profession, including non-government organizations (NGOs) dedicated to preserving and restoring vision of all people in the country.

The Annual Blindness Prevention National Conference is envisioned to enhance the knowledge-sharing capability on the issue of blindness prevention and provide greater resources for addressing the increasing incidence and prevalence of sight loss in the country. This annual conference will provide the venue for medical experts from around the world in sharing available best practice in the prevention and treatment of sight impaired patients in the country.

The conference shall also discuss and review various research and development efforts of research institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of sight loss problem in the country.

SEC. 7. *Blindness Prevention Month.* - In order to mainstream the program for the prevention of the increasing trend in the incidence and prevalence of blindness and sight loss problem in the country, the month of September is hereby declared the "***Blindness Prevention Month***".

All educational and health institutions and public offices throughout the country are hereby enjoined to give their support to the celebration of Blindness Prevention Month by conducting their respective activities with the active participation of all their students and workers.

SEC. 8. *Implementation of the Blindness Prevention Month.* - To ensure the significant impact on the implementation of the Blindness Prevention Month, the Department of Health (DOH) is hereby mandated to spearhead, as far as practicable, the conduct of simultaneous activities and programs in all provinces during the month long celebration.

For this purpose, the DOH is hereby tasked to implement programs which will:

- (a) include the prevention of blindness in national health development plans and goals;
- (b) provide visual screening, subjective and objective eye examinations to determine any related abnormalities in all of its health service delivery points;
- (c) integrate the prevention of blindness program into the primary health care programs of the government;
- (d) formulate effective coordination measures to empower local government units to deal with the cataract backlog among their constituents;
- (e) develop and strengthen eye care services and integrate them in the existing health care system of the government, including training and re-training of health workers in visual health, training of ophthalmologists, training of paramedical staff, and the provision for technology and infrastructure necessary to provide eye care; and
- (f) make available the essential medicines and supplies needed for the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of preventable visual impairment problems in the country

SEC. 9. *Monitoring Program.* — A comprehensive blindness prevention monitoring program shall be established under the Department of Health to determine and monitor the magnitude and prevalence of visual impairment and blindness problem in the Philippines, and for the purpose of evaluating the adequacy and efficacy of the program interventions being implemented by the government.

SEC. 10. *Annual Appropriation.* – The Department of Health (DOH) shall include in its annual programming and annual appropriation the amount necessary to fully implement the objectives of this Act.

SEC. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).* – Within three (3) months from the date of effectivity of this Act, the Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and concerned non-government organizations involved in blindness prevention, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 12. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations or parts thereof not consistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act, or the application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder of this Act shall not be affected thereby.

SEC. 14. *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,