

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



SENATE

S. No. 162

Introduced by Senator JUAN MIGUEL F. ZUBIRI

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article III, Section 7 of the 1987 Constitution states that, "The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records, and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law." This popular section is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution.

This bill, once enacted into law, is a great step towards that aspiration of our people. Our people have been, many times, given a roundabout by government agencies whenever they ask for data or information from our government agencies.

Under the proposed measure, we have provided a section that will impose criminal and administrative liability on any public officer or employee who would refuse or deny a request for data or information without valid reasons as specified in the bill.

To answer the concerns of some that such release of data or information would compromise or endanger national security, we have instituted enough safeguards and provided exceptions when faced with such scenario.

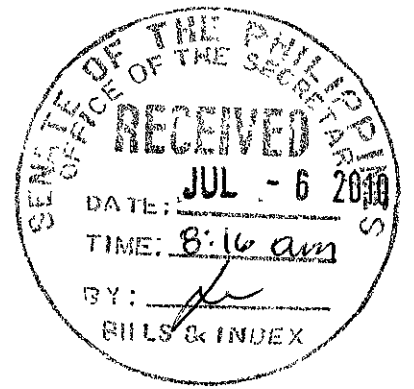
This measure is long overdue. More than 20 years since the Filipino people overwhelmingly ratified our present Constitution, Congress has yet to pass an enabling law that will operationalize this constitutional provision on the "Right to Information."

Thus, speedy passage of this measure is earnestly sought.



JUAN MIGUEL F. ZUBIRI

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AN ACT
IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO INFORMATION ON MATTERS
OF PUBLIC CONCERN GUARANTEED UNDER SECTION 7, ARTICLE III OF THE
1987 CONSTITUTION AND THE STATE POLICY OF FULL PUBLIC DISCLOSURE
OF ALL ITS TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING PUBLIC INTEREST UNDER SECTION 28,
ARTICLE II OF THE 1987 CONSTITUTION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

1 **SECTION 1. Title.** - This Act shall be known as the "Freedom of Information Act
2 of 2010".

3
4 **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** - The State recognizes the right of the people to
5 information on matters of public concern, and adopts and implements a policy of full
6 public disclosure of all its transactions involving public interest, subject to the
7 procedures and limitations provided by this Act. This right is indispensable to the
8 exercise of the right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable
9 participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making.

10
11 **SEC. 3. Coverage.** - This Act shall cover all government agencies as defined
12 under Section 4 of this Act.

13
14 **SEC. 4. Definition of Terms.** - As used in this Act:
15 (a) "Information" shall mean any knowledge, record, document, paper, report, letters,
16 contract, minutes and transcripts of official meetings, maps, books, photographs, data,
17 research material, film, sound and video recordings, magnetic or other tapes, electronic
18 data, computer stored data, or any other like or similar data or material recorded, stored
19 or archived in whatever form or format, which are made, received or kept in or under the
20 control and custody of my government agency pursuant to law, executive order, rules

1 and regulations, ordinance or in connection with the performance or transaction of
2 official business by any government agency.

3 b) "Government agency" shall include the executive, legislative and judicial branches as
4 well as the constitutional bodies of the Republic of the Philippines including, but not
5 limited to, the national government and all its agencies, departments, bureaus, offices
6 and instrumentalities, constitutional commissions and constitutionally mandated bodies,
7 local governments and all their agencies, regulatory agencies, chartered institutions,
8 government-owned or controlled corporations, including wholly-owned or controlled
9 subsidiaries, government financial institutions, state universities and colleges, the
10 Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, all offices in the
11 Congress or the Philippines including the offices of Senators and Representatives, the
12 Supreme Court and all lower courts established by law.

13 (c) "Official records" shall refer to information produced or received by a public officer or
14 employee, or by a government agency in an official capacity or pursuant to a public
15 function or duty, and is not meant to be a stage or status of the information.

16 (d) "Public records" shall include information required by law, executive orders, rules, or
17 regulations to be entered, kept and made publicly available by a government agency.

18

19 **SEC. 5. *Presumption.*** - There shall be a legal presumption in favor of access to
20 information. Accordingly, government agencies shall have the burden of proof of
21 showing by clear and convincing evidence that the information requested is exempted
22 from disclosure by this Act.

23

24 **SEC. 6. *Access to Information.*** - Government agencies shall make available to
25 the public for scrutiny, copying and reproduction in the manner provided by this Act, all
26 information pertaining to official acts, transactions or decisions, as well as government
27 research data used as basis for policy development, regardless of their physical form or
28 format in which they are contained and by whom they were made.

29

30 **SEC. 7. *Exceptions.*** - Subject to the qualifications set forth in Section 8 of this
31 Act, access to information may be denied when:

32 (a) The revelation of the information requested will create a clear and present danger of
33 war, invasion or any external threat to the State as determined by the Office of the
34 President and/or the Secretary of the Department of National Defense;

35 (b) The information requested pertains to the foreign affairs of the Republic of the
36 Philippines, when its revelation would unduly weaken the negotiating position of the
37 government in an ongoing bilateral or multilateral negotiation or seriously jeopardize

1 the diplomatic relations of the Philippines with one or more states with which it
2 intends to keep friendly relations;

3 (c) The information requested pertains to internal and external defense and law
4 enforcement, when the revelation thereof would render a legitimate military
5 operation ineffective, unduly compromise the prevention, detection or suppression of
6 a criminal activity, or endanger the life or physical safety of confidential or protected
7 sources or witnesses, law enforcement and military personnel or their immediate
8 families. Information relating to the details of the administration, budget and
9 expenditure, and management of the defense and law enforcement agencies shall
10 always be accessible to the public;

11 (d) The information requested pertains to the personal information of a natural person
12 other than the requesting party, and its disclosure would constitute a clearly
13 unwarranted invasion of his or her personal privacy, unless it forms part of a public
14 record, or the person is or was an official of a government agency and the
15 information requested relates to his or her public function, or the person has
16 consented to the disclosure of the requested information;

17 (e) The information requested pertains to trade, industrial, financial or commercial
18 secrets of a natural or juridical person other than the requesting party, obtained in
19 confidence by, and/or filed with a government agency, whenever the revelation
20 thereof would seriously prejudice the interests of such natural or juridical person in
21 trade, industrial, financial or commercial competition, unless such natural or juridical
22 person has consented to the disclosure of the requested information;

23 (f) The information requested is privileged from production in legal proceedings by law
24 or by the Rules or Court, unless the person entitled to the privilege has waived it;

25 (g) The information requested is exempted by law, in addition to those provided in this
26 Section;

27 (h) The information requested is obtained by any committee of either House of
28 Congress in executive session, whenever such information falls under any of the
29 foregoing exceptions; and

30 (i) The information requested consists of drafts of decisions by any executive,
31 administrative, judicial or quasi-judicial body in the exercise of their adjudicatory
32 functions whenever the revelation thereof would reasonably tend to impair the
33 impartiality of verdicts, or otherwise obstruct the administration of justice.

34
35 **SEC. 8. Qualifications.** - Even if the information requested falls under the
36 exceptions set forth in the preceding section, access to information shall not be denied
37 if:

- 1 (a) The information requested may be reasonably severed from the body of the
2 information which would be subject to the exceptions;
- 3 (b) The public interest in the disclosure outweighs the harm to the interest sought to be
4 protected by the exceptions; or
- 5 (c) The requesting party is either House of Congress, or any of its Committees, unless
6 the disclosure will constitute a violation of the Constitution.

7

8 **SEC. 9. Procedure of Access.** - (a) Any person who wishes to obtain
9 information shall submit a request to the government agency concerned personally, by
10 mail, or through electronic means. The request shall state the name and preferred
11 contact information of the requesting party, and reasonably describe the information
12 required, the reason for the request of the information and the preferred means by
13 which the government agency shall communicate such requested information to the
14 requesting party: *Provided*, that the stated reason, or the failure to state the reason for
15 the request of the information, shall not be used as a ground to deny the request or to
16 refuse the acceptance of the request, unless such reason is contrary to law. If the
17 request is submitted personally, the requesting party shall show his current identification
18 card issued by any government agency, or government or private employer or school,
19 or a community tax certificate. If the request is submitted by mail or through electronic
20 means, the requesting party may submit a photostatic or electronically scanned copy of
21 the identification, or other convenient means as determined by the agency.

22 (b) The request shall be stamped by the government agency, indicating the date and
23 time of receipt and the name, rank, title and position of the receiving public officer or
24 employee with the corresponding signature, and a copy thereof furnished to the
25 requesting party. In case the request is submitted by electronic means, the government
26 agency shall provide for an equivalent means by which the requirements of this
27 paragraph shall be met.

28 (c) The request may indicate the following preferred means of communication:

- 29 (1) A true copy of the information requested in permanent or other form;
- 30 (2) An opportunity to inspect the requested information, using equipment
31 normally available to the government agency when necessary;
- 32 (3) An opportunity to copy the requested information using personal equipment;
- 33 (4) A written transcript of the information requested contained in an audio or
34 visual form;
- 35 (5) A transcript of the content of the information requested, in print, sound or
36 visual form, where such transcript is capable of being produced using
37 equipment normally available to the government agency;
- 38 (6) A transcript of the requested information from shorthand or codified form; or

1 (7) Other reasonable means or format.

2 (d) A government agency may communicate the information requested in a form other
3 than the preferred means whenever such preferred means would unreasonably interfere
4 with the effective operation of the agency, or be detrimental to the preservation of the
5 record.

6 (e) The government agency shall comply with such request within seven (7) calendar
7 days from the receipt thereof.

8 (f) The time limits prescribed in this Section for the production of the requested
9 information may be extended whenever there is a need for any of the following:

10 (1) To search for and collect the requested information from field facilities or
11 other establishments that are separate from the office processing the request;

12 (2) To search for, collect and appropriately examine a voluminous amount of
13 separate and distinct information which are demanded in a single request;

14 (3) Consultation, which shall be conducted in all practicable speed, with another
15 government agency or among two (2) or more components of the government
16 agency having substantial interest in the determination of the request; and

17 (4) To consider fortuitous events or other events due to *force majeure* or other
18 analogous cases.

19 (g) The government agency shall, in writing or through electronic means, notify the
20 person making the request of the extension, setting forth the reasons for such extension
21 and the date when the information requested shall be made available: *Provided*, that no
22 such notice shall specify a date that would result in an extension of more than fifteen
23 (15) calendar days from the original deadline.

24
25 **SEC. 10. Access Fees.** - Government agencies may charge a reasonable fee to
26 reimburse the actual cost of reproduction, copying or transcription and the
27 communication of the information requested.

28
29 **SEC. 11. Notice of Denial.** - If the government agency decides to deny the
30 request, in whole or in part, it shall, within seven (7) calendar days from the receipt of
31 the request, notify the person making the request of such denial in writing or through
32 electronic means. The notice shall clearly indicate the name, rank, title or position of the
33 person making the denial, and the grounds for the denial. In case the denial is by
34 reason of a claimed exception, the denial shall also state clearly the legitimate aim or
35 interest sought to be protected in the confidentiality, and the facts and circumstances
36 invoked showing the substantial harm to, or frustration of, the legitimate aim or interest
37 that will result in the disclosure of the information requested. Failure to notify the person

1 making the request of the denial, or of the extension, shall be deemed a denial of the
2 request for access to information.

3

4 **SEC. 12. Implementation Requirements.** -- (a) For the effective implementation
5 of this Act, every government agency shall prepare a Freedom of Information Manual,
6 which shall include the following information:

7 (1) The location and contact information of the head, regional, provincial and field
8 offices, and other' established places where the public can obtain information
9 or submit requests;

10 (2) The types of information it generates, produces, holds and/or publishes;

11 (3) A description of its record-keeping system;

12 (4) The person or office responsible for receiving requests for information;

13 (5) The procedure for the filing of requests personally, by mail. or through the
14 identified electronic means;

15 (6) The standard forms for the submission of request and for the proper
16 acknowledgement of the request;

17 (7) The process for the disposition of the request, including the routing of the
18 request to the person or office with the duty to act on the request, the
19 decision-making, and the grant or denial of access and its implementation;

20 (8) The procedure for the administrative appeal of any denial for access to
21 information;

22 (9) The schedule of fees;

23 (10) The process and procedure for the mandatory disclosure of information
24 under Section 14 of this Act;

25 (11) Should the agency lack the capacity to comply with Section 14 (a) of this
26 Act, a brief description of its plan to facilitate compliance within three (3) years
27 from the approval of this Act; and

28 (12) Such other information, taking into consideration the unique characteristics
29 of an agency, that will help facilitate the effective implementation of this Act.

30 (b) The foregoing information shall also be posted in its website and bulletin boards, and
31 shall be regularly updated;

32 (c) In no case shall the absence of the aforementioned guidelines be a reason for the
33 denial of any request for information made in accordance with this Act.

34

35 **SEC. 13. Remedies in Cases of Denial.** - (a) In all government agencies other
36 than the judicial branch-

37 (1) Every denial of any request for access to information may be appealed to the
38 person or office next higher in authority, following the procedure mentioned in

1 Section 12 (8) of this Act: *Provided*, that the appeal must be filed within fifteen
2 (15) calendar days from the notice of denial and must be decided within
3 fifteen (15) calendar days from filing. Failure of the government agency to
4 decide within the aforesated period shall constitute a denial of the appeal;
5 and

6 (2) Instead of appealing or after the denial of the appeal, the person denied
7 access to information may file a verified complaint with the Office of the
8 Ombudsman, praying that the government agency concerned be directed to
9 immediately afford access to the information being requested. Such complaint
10 shall be resolved by the Office of the Ombudsman within sixty (60) calendar
11 days from filing, or earlier when time is of the essence taking into account
12 such factors as the nature of the information requested, context of the
13 request, public interest and danger that the information requested will become
14 moot. The Office of the Ombudsman shall promulgate its special rules of
15 procedure for the immediate disposition of complaints filed pursuant to this
16 Section. Unless restrained or enjoined, the decisions of the Office of the
17 Ombudsman shall be immediately executory, without prejudice to review in
18 accordance with the Rules of Court.

19 (3) Instead of filing a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman, whenever a
20 request for information is denied originally or on administrative appeal, the
21 requesting party may file a verified petition for mandamus in the proper court,
22 alleging the facts with certainty and praying that judgment be rendered
23 ordering the respondent, immediately or at some other time to be specified by
24 the court, to disclose the information requested and to pay the damages
25 sustained by the requesting party by reason of the denial. The procedure for
26 such petition shall be summary in nature.

27 (b) In the Judicial Branch - The Supreme Court shall promulgate the remedies that
28 would govern offices under its jurisdiction.

29 (c) The remedies under this section are without prejudice to any other administrative,
30 civil or criminal action that may arise from the same act.

31 (d) The remedies available under this Act shall be exempt from the rules on non-
32 exhaustion of administrative remedies and the application of the provisions of
33 Republic Act No. 9285, otherwise known as the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of
34 2004.

35 (e) In case the requesting party has limited or no financial capacity, the Public
36 Attorney's Office shall be mandated to provide legal assistance to the requesting
37 party in availing of the remedies provided under this Act.
38

1 **SEC. 14. Mandatory Disclosure of Transactions Involving Public Interest.** --- (a)

2 Subject to Sections 7 and 8 of this Act, all government agencies shall upload on their
3 websites, which shall be regularly updated every fifteen (15) days, all the steps,
4 negotiations and key government positions pertaining to definite propositions of the
5 government, as well as the contents of the contract, agreement or treaty in the following
6 transactions involving public interest:

- 7 (1) Compromise agreements entered into by a government agency with any person
8 or entity involving any waiver or its rights or claims;
- 9 (2) Private sector participation agreements or contracts in infrastructure and
10 development projects under Republic Act No. 6957, as amended by Republic Act
11 No. 7718, authorizing the financing, construction, operation and maintenance of
12 infrastructure projects;
- 13 (3) Procurement contracts entered into by a government agency;
- 14 (4) Construction or concession agreements or contracts entered into by a
15 government agency with any domestic or foreign person or entity;
- 16 (5) Loans, grants, development assistance, technical assistance and programs
17 entered into by a government agency with official bilateral or multilateral
18 agencies, as well as with private aid agencies or institutions;
- 19 (6) Loans from domestic and foreign financial institutions;
- 20 (7) Guarantees given by any government agency to government-owned or -
21 controlled corporations and to private corporations, persons or entities;
- 22 (8) Public funding extended to any private entity;
- 23 (9) Bilateral or multilateral agreements and treaties in defense, trade, economic
24 partnership, investments, cooperation and similar binding commitments; or
- 25 (10) Licenses, permits or agreements given by any government agency to any
26 person or entity for the extraction and/or utilization of natural resources.

27
28 A summary list of the foregoing information uploaded in the website shall be
29 posted in the bulletin boards of the concerned government agency.

30
31 (b) The information uploaded in the website under letter (a) of this Section may
32 be withdrawn after a period of three years from the time of uploading: *Provided*; that an
33 abstract of the information withdrawn shall remain uploaded in the website, containing a
34 brief description of the transaction and an enumeration of the information withdrawn,
35 and indicating the dates of posting and withdrawal.

36
37 (c) Should an agency lack the capacity to comply with letter (a) of this Section,
38 the agency shall initiate a capacity-building program, or coordinate with another

1 appropriate agency, to facilitate substantive compliance not later than three (3) years
2 upon approval of this Act.

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SEC. 15. Promotion of Openness in Government. –

(a) Duty to Publish Information - Government agencies shall regularly publish, print and disseminate at no cost to the public and in an accessible form, in conjunction with R.A. 9485, or the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, and through their website, timely, true, accurate and updated key information including, but not limited to:

- (1) A description of its mandate, structure, powers, functions, duties and decision-making processes;
- (2) A description of the frontline services it delivers and the procedure and length of time by which they may be availed of;
- (3) The names of its key officials, their powers, functions and responsibilities, and their profiles and curriculum vitae;
- (4) Work programs, development plans, investment plans, projects, performance targets and accomplishments, and budgets, revenue allotments and expenditures;
- (5) Important rules and regulations, orders or decisions;: *Provided*, that they be published within fifteen (15) calendar days from promulgation;
- (6) Current and important database and statistics that it generates;
- (7) Bidding processes and requirements; and
- (8) Mechanisms or procedures by which the public may participate in or otherwise influence the formulation of policy or the exercise of its powers.

(b) Keeping of Records - Government agencies shall maintain and preserve their records in a manner that facilitates easy identification, retrieval and communication to the public. They shall establish Management Information Systems (MIS) to strengthen their capability to store, manage and retrieve records, and to facilitate access to public records. The following shall not be destroyed:

- (1) Records pertaining to loans obtained or guaranteed by the government;
- (2) Records of government contracts;
- (3) The declaration under oath of the assets, liabilities and net worth of public officers and employees, as required by law;
- (4) Records of official investigations on graft and corrupt practices of public officers; and
- (5) Other records where there is a significant public interest in their preservation or where there is likely to be such interest in the future.

1 (c) Accessibility of Language and Form - Every government agency shall endeavor to
2 translate key information into major Filipino languages and present them in popular form
3 and means.

4 (d) Improving Capability - Every government agency shall ensure the provision of
5 adequate training for its officials to improve awareness of the right to information and
6 the provisions of this Act, and to keep updated of best practices in relation to
7 information disclosure, records maintenance and archiving.

8

9 **SEC. 16. Criminal Liability and Administrative Liability.** - The penalty of
10 imprisonment of not less than one (1) month but not more than six (6) months shall be
11 imposed upon:

12 (a) Any public officer or employee receiving the request under Section 9 of this
13 Act who shall fail to promptly forward the request to the public officer within
14 the same office or agency responsible for officially acting on the request when
15 such is the direct cause of the failure to disclose the information requested
16 within the periods required by this Act;

17 (b) Any public officer or employee responsible for officially acting on the request,
18 who shall:

19 (1) Fail, to act on the request within the periods required by this Act;

20 (2) Knowingly deny the existence of existing requested information;

21 (3) Destroy information being requested for the purpose of frustrating the
22 requesting party's access thereto;

23 (4) Claim an exception under Section 8 of this Act, or under the Constitution,
24 when the claim is manifestly devoid of factual basis; or

25 (5) Refuse to comply with the decision of his immediate supervisor, the
26 Ombudsman or the court ordering the release of the information requested
27 that is not restrained or enjoined by a court;

28 (c) The head of office of the government agency directly and principally
29 responsible for the negotiation and perfection of any of the transactions
30 enumerated in Section 13 (a) of this Act, who shall knowingly refuse, to direct
31 the mandatory posting or uploading of such transaction despite the agency
32 capacity to implement such directive. The same penalty shall be imposed
33 upon the public officer or employee who, despite a directive from the head of
34 office, shall fail, to post or upload any of the transactions enumerated in
35 Section 14 of this Act;

36 (d) Any public officer or employee who shall destroy, or cause to destroy, records
37 of information covered by Section 15 (b) of this Act;

- 1 (e) Any public officer who formulates policies, rules and regulations manifestly
2 contrary to the provisions of this Act, and which policies, rules and regulations
3 are the direct cause of the denial of a request for information; or
4 (f) Any public or private individual who knowingly induced or caused the
5 commission of the foregoing acts under this section.
6

7 The foregoing shall be without prejudice to any administrative liability of the
8 offender under existing laws and regulations.
9

10 **SEC. 17. Act Not a Bar to Claim of Right to Information Under the**
11 **Constitution.** - No provision of this Act shall be interpreted as a bar to any claim of
12 denial of the right to information under Article III, Section 7 of the 1987 Constitution.
13

14 **SEC. 18. Separability Clause.** - If, for any reason, any section or provision of
15 this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, no other section or provision shall be affected.
16

17 **SEC. 19. Repealing Clause.** - All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and
18 regulations, issuances or any part thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act,
19 including Memorandum Circular No. 78 dated 14 August 1964 (Promulgating Rules
20 Governing Security of Classified Matter in Government Offices), as amended, and
21 Section 3, Rule IV of the Rules Implementing Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct
22 and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees), are deemed repealed.
23

24 **SEC. 20. Effectivity.** - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
25 publication in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.
26

27 Approved,