

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS  
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **9369**



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**Introduced by Representative MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI**

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**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

Cases of autism spectrum disorder in the Philippines have been steadily rising in the past ten years. According to the Department of Health, the number of Filipinos on the spectrum has ballooned from Five Hundred Thousand (500,000) in 2008 to One Million (1,000,000) in April 2018, and that is only from a limited statistical pool. As the cases continue to rise, it is imperative that the government finally recognize the prevalence of autism and provide much-needed services to people living with it.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects a person's communicative and interactive abilities. It often manifests itself through symptoms from early childhood. There is, at the moment, no identifiable cause for it, and as such, no cure. Even so, we can ensure that people on the spectrum receive proper, personalized treatment such as applied behavioral analysis, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and verbal behavior therapy. Quality treatment will help them gain foundational skills that will make them better equipped to lead healthy and meaningful lives.

But these treatments are moot if they remain financially incapacitated. In a 2014 study, researchers in the United States and the United Kingdom estimated that expenses for lifelong care of an individual with autism can add up to \$2.4 million. Autism care is a costly burden. A government-funded Center of Autism will help alleviate some of that burden, especially for indigent patients and their families.

The establishment of a Center for Autism in the Philippines will answer to the needs of people dealing with autism, as it will offer accessible diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitation services, as well as vocational training services to adults with autism. It will also launch a strong autism awareness program to normalize and de-stigmatize autism in society, that will help us all create an environment conducive to the growth and development of people on the spectrum.

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

**MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Manuel Antonio F. Zubiri", written over the printed name.

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**AN ACT**  
**ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

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

**SECTION 1. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the state to promote and protect the right of all individuals to live a full, healthy, holistic and quality life. This includes individuals who are suffering from autism or any kind of developmental disability. Therefore, the state shall promote and protect the rights of autistic individuals by providing them adequate support through easy access to health care, educational and other services.

**SEC. 2. Definition of Terms.** – For purposes of this Act, the terms below shall be constructed to mean, except where explicitly indicated or where the text clearly indicates otherwise as follows:

- a) **Autism** – is a developmental disability that appears during the first three years of life; the result of a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain;
- b) **Disability** - shall mean 1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more psychological, physiological or anatomical function of an individual or activities of such individual; 2) a record of such an impairment; or 3) regarded as having such an impairment;
- c) **Disabled Gifted** – persons who demonstrate superior performance capabilities in intellectual, creative, specific academic areas, leadership, or in the arts in spite of physical, sensory or psychological disabilities;

- d) **Disabled Worker** – means a worker whose earning capacity is impaired by mental, physical, or sensory deficiency or injury;
- e) **Handicap** – refers to disadvantage for given individual, resulting from an impairment of disability that limits or prevents the function of activity, that is considered normal given the age and sex of the individual;
- f) **Impairment** – is any loss, diminution or aberration of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure of function;
- g) **Indigent patient** – a disabled person whose level of income falls below poverty threshold;
- h) **Rehabilitation** – an integrated approach to physical, psychological, cultural, spiritual, educational, or vocational, measures that create conditions for individual to attain the highest possible level of functional ability; and,
- i) **Special Education (SPED)** – type of education specifically designed for learners with special needs who cannot profit maximally from regular education such that they require trained personnel modifications in the curricula, teaching methods, instructional materials and adaptations in facilities equipment.

**SEC. 3. Creation of a Center for Autism.** – There is hereby created a center for Autism which shall be tasked to perform the following functions:

- 1) Formulate and implement an integrated and comprehensive master plan;
- 2) Create a diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation clinic;
- 3) Provide vocational training programs for autistic adults;
- 4) Provide free diagnosis and rehabilitation services to indigent autistic;
- 5) Provide continuing training programs for teachers, therapists, and other medical professionals, ;
- 6) Provide other services such as counseling, orientation and referral; and
- 7) Increase public awareness and concern on autism by spearheading advocacy programs.

**SEC. 4. Governing Board, Composition, Term, Functions.** – There is hereby created a National Autism Board, hereby referred to as the Board, which shall be under the Office of the President. The Board shall govern the Center for Autism and shall be composed of the following:

- 1) One (1) representative from the Department of Health, who shall sit as Chairperson;

- 2) One (1) representative from the Department of Education who shall sit as the Vice-Chairperson;
- 3) One (1) representative from the Department of Social Welfare and Development as Member;
- 4) Two (2) representatives from the National Council for Welfare of Disabled Persons as Members;
- 5) Two (2) representatives from the Autism Society of the Philippines as Members; and,
- 6) Two (2) representatives from the Parents of Children and Adults with Autism as Members.

**SEC. 5. Secretariat** – The board shall have a Secretariat under an Executive Officer who shall be appointed by the President. The Executive Officer shall manage the day-to-day operations of the Board and shall be assisted by a Deputy Executive Officer who shall likewise be appointed by the President.

The Executive Officer shall have the following powers and functions:

- 1) Execute, administer and implement the policies and measures approved by the Board;
- 2) Direct and supervise the affairs and operations of the Board;
- 3) Submit within thirty (30) days after the close of every calendar year an annual report to the Board and such other reports it may require;
- 4) Submit an annual budget and such supplementary budgets as may be necessary to the Board for its consideration and approval;
- 5) Represent the Board in all transactions with other offices, agencies, instrumentalities of government and with all persons and other entities, public or private, domestic or foreign; and,
- 6) Appoint, subject to confirmation of the Board, and discipline in accordance with Civil Service laws, rules and regulations, the officers and personnel below the level of Deputy Executive Officer.

The Deputy Executive Officer shall perform the following functions;

- 1) Assist the Executive Officer in the discharge of his powers and functions;
- 2) Act as the Executive Officer during the Executive Officer's absence; and,
- 3) Discharge such other powers and functions as may be required by the Executive Officer and the Board

**SEC. 6. Appropriations.** – For the initial operating expenses of the Center, the amount of Five Million Pesos (5,000,000.00) is hereby appropriated from the available funds of the Office of the President. Thereafter, it shall submit to the Department of Budget and Management, its proposed budget for inclusion in the General Appropriations Act.

**SEC. 7. Transitory Provisions.** – Within the period of one hundred and eighty (180) days after the approval of this Act, the Board constituted shall start its operation. All other government offices having functions similar to the Board shall then cease to perform such functions. Henceforth, these functions shall be deemed transferred to the board.

**SEC. 8. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – The Board in consultation with appropriate agencies from the private and government sectors shall issue guidelines and prescribe rules and regulations within one hundred (100) days after the effectivity of this Act which shall be published in two (2) newspapers of general circulation. A copy of such guidelines, rules and regulations shall be furnished to the Congress of the Philippines.

**SEC. 9. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations and other issuances, or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

**SEC. 10. Separability Clause.** – Should any provision of this Act, be declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions of this Act which are not affected hereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

**SEC. 11. Effectivity.** – This act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

*Approved,*