

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

**NINETEENTH CONGRESS**  
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 5317



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Introduced by Representative Ma. Rene Ann Lourdes G. Matibag

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### EXPLANATORY NOTE

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3 As provided for in Section 2 of Republic Act 7662 or the “Legal Education Reform  
4 Act of 1993” creating the Legal Education Board (LEB), “It is the declared policy of the  
5 State to uplift the standards of legal education in order to prepare law students for  
6 advocacy, counselling, problem-solving, and decision-making, to infuse in them the ethics  
7 of the legal profession, to impress in them the importance, nobility and dignity of the legal  
8 profession as an equal and indispensable partner of the Bench in the administration of  
9 justice and to develop social competence. Towards this end, the State shall undertake  
10 appropriate reforms in the legal education system, require proper selection of law  
11 students, maintain quality among legal education institutions, and require legal  
12 apprenticeship and continuing legal education.”  
13

14 One specific area where there is a pressing need for reforms is in the right of  
15 access of law students to affordable quality legal education – one that would fortify their  
16 moral compass, hone their skills and sharpen their minds as well as develop in them a  
17 sense of mission in their work so that they would be aware of the true essence of their  
18 profession, which is charitable service for the poor and marginalized individuals and  
19 communities.  
20

21 The “Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017” (RA 10931) has  
22 already provided the means by which all bona fide students in State Universities and  
23 Colleges (SUCs) regardless of the program or course enrolled in, could avail of free tuition  
24 and other fees in every academic year until graduation, provided he or she is in good  
25 academic standing with no disciplinary case.  
26

27 Congress has allocated certain amounts in the annual General Appropriations Act  
28 of 2017 until 2021 indicated as a line item in the CHED Budget for the program called  
29 “Cash Grants to Medical Students enrolled in SUCs” (CGMS-SUCs), intended for free  
30 tuition and other expenses of medical students in the eight (8) SUC Colleges of Medicine  
31 numbering approximately 1,650-1,750 a year and provided budgetary allocation in the  
32 amount of from P187-P317 Million for FY 2017-2021.  
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14  
15 **AN ACT PROMOTING ACCESS TO QUALITY LEGAL EDUCATION BY PROVIDING**  
16 **FOR FREE TUITION AND OTHER SCHOOL FEES IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND**  
17 **COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

18  
19 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress*  
20 *assembled:*

21  
22 **SECTION 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “Free Legal Education Act of  
23 2023”.

24  
25 **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is the policy of the State to provide appropriate legal  
26 measures for the protection of human rights of all persons within the Philippines, as well  
27 as Filipinos residing abroad; offer economic assistance to the underprivileged and  
28 marginalized sectors; deliver free legal services to indigent litigants, and address the lack  
29 of and unavailability of legal practitioners in the different government agencies in the  
30 country.

31  
32 Likewise, the State hereby recognizes the invaluable role of lawyers and the legal  
33 education out of which they are molded, in the attainment of societal progress. Towards  
34 this end, the State shall encourage the youth to pursue a career in legal education and  
35 thereafter, provide them with opportunities for employment in the legal field through which  
36 they could better serve their countrymen.

37  
38 **SEC. 3. Definition of Terms.** The following terms shall be defined conceptually as they  
39 are used throughout the statute. –

- 40  
41 **1) Legal Education** – Legal education refers the totality of various academic  
42 programs in higher education designed for the training of prospective lawyers,  
43 allied professionals and legal scholars. It shall encompass the basic and graduate  
44 law programs, and other legal studies programs;  
45

46 **2) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** – refers to an educational institution,  
47 private or public, undertaking operations of higher education program/s with an  
48 organized group of students pursuing defined studies in higher education,  
49 receiving instructions from teachers, usually located in a building or group of  
50 buildings in a particular site specifically intended for educational purposes. The  
51 following are the classifications of Higher Education Institutions:

52  
53 a) **Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs)** are institutions incorporated  
54 as stock or non-stock corporations and supervised and regulated by the  
55 Commission on Higher Education, except for the law program;

56  
57 b) **State Universities and Colleges (SUCs)** are those created by special laws or  
58 charters, governed by their respective board of regents or board of trustees,  
59 chaired by the CHED Chairperson according to RA 8292; and

60  
61 **3) Legal Education Institutions (LEIs)** – All higher education institutions accredited  
62 by the Legal Education Board to offer basic and/or graduate law programs, allied  
63 legal studies programs and/or other legal studies programs and recognized by the  
64 Commission on Higher Education (CHED), when applicable.

65  
66 **SEC. 4. Establishment of Free Legal Education Program in SUCs** – There shall be  
67 established a Free Legal Education Program for deserving students in state universities  
68 and colleges (SUCs). All Filipino students who are either currently enrolled in the Juris  
69 Doctor Program offered in SUCs at the time of the effectivity of this Act, or shall enroll at  
70 any time thereafter, after passing the entrance examination and other admission and  
71 retention requirements of the said SUCs, shall be exempt from paying tuition and other  
72 school fees for units enrolled in.

73  
74 All SUCs with a Law Program duly accredited by the Legal Education Board shall be  
75 qualified to implement this Act insofar as beneficial to their *bona fide* law students.

76  
77 The SUCs shall create a mechanism, which will ensure that the beneficial provisions of  
78 this Act, relative to tuition and other school fees subsidy, need not apply to students with  
79 the financial capacity to pay for their education.

80  
81 **SEC. 5. Coverage.** – The Free Legal Education Program shall cover the following:

82  
83 1) Tuition fees at the rate approved by the SUC governing board as of date of  
84 passage of this Act; and

85 2) Other school fees including but not limited to:

86 a) Fees for prescribed books, on a reimbursement basis, as determined by the  
87 LEB, upon consultation with its stakeholders;

88 b) Student registration fees; and

89 c) Library fees.

90

91 **SEC. 6. Exceptions.** – The following students are ineligible to avail of the Free Legal  
92 Education:

- 93
- 94 1) Students who have already attained a Bachelor of Laws or a Juris Doctor degree  
95 from any legal education or institution.
- 96 2) Students who fail to comply with the admission and retention policies of SUCs.
- 97 3) Students who fail to complete their Juris Doctor degree within the period prescribed  
98 in the program.
- 99

100 Students (who are) ineligible to avail of the Free Legal Education Program shall be  
101 charged the tuition and other school fees as determined by the governing Board of the  
102 SUCs.

103

104 **SEC. 7. Harmonization with the Clinical Legal Education Program.** – Pursuant to  
105 Section 5(5), Article VIII of the 1987 Constitution, the Supreme Court is empowered to  
106 adopt and promulgate rules through the amendment of the provisions of Rule 138-A or  
107 the Revised Law Student Practice Rule of the Rules of Court.

108

109 The Legal Education Board shall adopt the policy on the Revised Law Student Practice  
110 Rule, ensure that law students participate in the clinical legal education programs in all  
111 legal education institutions, define the scope of service to be rendered by law students  
112 in the said program, contribute to access to justice of the marginalized sectors, enhance  
113 learning opportunities of law students, instill among them social responsibility and  
114 awareness, and prepare them for the practice of law.

115

116 **SEC. 8. Harmonization with the UniFAST Act.** – Pursuant to Republic Act No. 10687,  
117 the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) is the existing  
118 system to unify and harmonize all publicly-funded national government programs for  
119 Student Financial Assistance Programs, including but not limited to scholarships, grants-  
120 in-aid, and student loans for tertiary education.

121

122 As the repository of all government-funded modalities of Student Financial Assistance  
123 Programs for tertiary education in both public and private institutions, the UniFAST is  
124 mandated by law to implement the disbursement of student financial grants including the  
125 Free Legal Education Program, the latter in coordination with the LEB, which shall provide  
126 UniFAST with validating data or information on the currently enrolled registered law  
127 students per semester.

128

129 **SEC. 9. Prohibited Acts.** – Upon effectivity of this Act, it shall be unlawful for any SUC,  
130 or any person or entity representing an SUC, to collect tuition and other school fees from  
131 qualified law students during the registration or enrollment period. Provided, that this  
132 provision shall not apply to law students who voluntarily opt out of the subsidy or are  
133 otherwise ineligible to avail of the provisions of this Act.

136 **SEC. 10. Penalties.** – A commission of any prohibited act defined under the next  
137 preceding section shall subject the SUC to an administrative case under the jurisdiction  
138 of the LEB, and shall result in the imposition of the appropriate administrative sanction,  
139 including but not limited to: (a) downgrading of the government recognition; (b) phase-out  
140 of the law program; and (c) termination of the law program.

141  
142 This is without prejudice to the civil or criminal liability of the party responsible therefor.

143  
144 **SEC. 11. Reporting Requirements.** – All SUCs shall submit to the UniFAST and the  
145 LEB, within five (5) days after the last day of registration for each semester, a report  
146 detailing the names of law students eligible for free tuition and other school fees of the  
147 institution, under this Act.

148  
149 SUCs shall submit a report to the LEB and UniFAST before the start of an academic year  
150 on the projected number of enrollees for each academic year set by the respective  
151 governing boards of SUCs. Before the start of each academic year, the SUCs shall submit  
152 a report to the LEB and UniFAST on their projected number of enrollees as determined  
153 by their respective governing boards for the purpose of implementing the disbursement  
154 of student financial grants.

155  
156 **SEC. 12. Appropriations.** – The amount necessary to carry out the implementation of  
157 this Act shall be included in the current year’s appropriation of the UniFAST.

158  
159 Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continuous implementation of the Free Legal  
160 Education Program provided under this Act shall be included in the UniFAST  
161 appropriations in the annual General Appropriations Act.

162  
163 **SEC. 13. Oversight Committee.** –

164  
165 **SEC. 14. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – Within one hundred twenty (120)  
166 days from the effectivity of this Act, the LEB as lead, in coordination with the CHED,  
167 UniFAST, DBM, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC),  
168 Association of Local Colleges and University (ALCU), Philippine Association of Law  
169 Schools (PALS), Association of Law Students (ALSP), shall formulate and issue the rules  
170 and regulations to fully implement the provisions of this Act.

171  
172 **SEC. 15. Separability Clause.** – Should any part or provision of this Act be determined  
173 to be unconstitutional or invalid, the other parts or provisions not affected thereby shall  
174 remain in full force and effect.

175  
176 **SEC. 16. Repealing Clause.** – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations  
177 and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby  
178 repealed or modified accordingly.

179  
180 **SEC. 17. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in  
181 the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

182

183 Approved,