

Republic of the Philippines  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS  
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 6543



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Introduced by Representative CAMILLE A. VILLAR

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AN ACT  
PROVIDING FOR MANDATORY INSURANCE COVERAGE AND BENEFITS  
AND HAZARD PAY FOR JOURNALISTS, EMPLOYEES OF MEDIA ENTITIES ON  
FIELD ASSIGNMENTS AND FREELANCE JOURNALISTS, AND FOR OTHER  
PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Freedom of the press is guaranteed in the 1987 Philippine Constitution as declared in the following provisions:

“No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.” (Article III, Section 4);

“The State shall provide the policy environment for the full development of Filipino capability and the emergence of communication structures suitable to the needs and aspirations of the nation and the balanced flow of information into, out of, and across the country, in accordance with a policy that respects the freedom of speech and of the press.” (Article XVI, Section 10).

The Philippines has consistently ranked among the world’s most dangerous countries for journalists after war-torn countries Syria and Iraq.

During important assignments, journalists face the most dangerous situations like typhoons, disasters, floods, riots, war and conflicts, to name a few, in order to deliver the news to the public. They accept field assignments bringing only their passion sans insurance or hazard pay although they risk their lives in the name of journalism. What was considered the single deadliest attack against journalists during peacetime happened in Maguindanao in November 2009, where at least 34 were killed and buried in broad daylight in Ampatuan town.

Under this proposal, benefits are being extended to all permanent, temporary, contractual and casual journalists employed by media entities in the Philippines, as well as freelance journalists.

Apart from existing insurance benefits under the Social Security System (SSS) or the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to covered journalists, additional insurance coverage such as disability and death benefits and reimbursement of medical costs will be given to them on their field assignments. Freelance journalists, on the other hand, may tap a special program to be created under the SSS or the GSIS when they are covering war zones, conflict areas and calamities.

Tax-exempt hazard pay shall also be granted to all qualified journalists deployed in calamity areas and the like equivalent to at least 25% of their gross monthly basic salary for the duration of their deployment.

It is time that journalists deserve the respect not only for the type of work that they are doing but also in the form of benefits that are long overdue. While some may not enjoy decent wages, it is necessary that journalists enjoy these perks as they have families that rely on them.

As such, approval of this bill is sought.



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*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 "Journalists Protection Act of 2022."

Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policies and Objectives.* - The State recognizes the invaluable role of the free press in the protection and promotion of democracy, good citizenship, civic mindedness, and good governance. Towards this end, the State shall provide the necessary support to ensure that the journalists are properly compensated and insured as they practice their profession.

Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* - For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

(a) Editorial and/or News Department - refers to editors-in-chief, news editors, columnists, deskmen, reporters, correspondents, and photographers in the case of the print media; and news editors, newscasters, commentators/announcers, field reporters, field correspondents, and cameramen in the case of the broadcast media;

(b) Freelance Journalist - one who pursues journalism and writes for any publication without being regularly employed by such publication, television or radio, wire, wireless broadcasting and online services;

(c) Front-line media persons - refers to those directly involved in data-gathering from the field, and news reporting whether in print, on television or on radio, such as, but not limited to, print reporters, cameramen, photojournalists, radio reporter and television reporters;

(d) Journalism -the gathering, writing, editing, processing and dissemination of news and production or publishing of newspapers and other such publications such as magazines and pamphlets and other processes through wire, wireless, broadcasting, and online services;

(e) Journalist - shall mean any member of the Editorial and/or News Department including front-line media persons;

(f) Media entities - refers to all companies in the print and broadcast media (radio, television and newspapers) that are involved in the dissemination of news and information for public consumption and are duly accredited by and duly registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and by any reputable association of media persons such as, but not limited to, the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), Philippine Press Institute (PPI), Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP), Photojournalists' Center of the Philippines (PCP), People's Alternative Media Network (Altermidya), National Press Club (NPC), National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) and Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas (KBP).

Sec. 4. *Coverage.* – This Act shall apply to all permanent, temporary, contractual, and casual journalists employed or engaged to work by all existing media entities in the Philippines, as well as freelance journalists plying their trade in war-torn, disease-stricken, or otherwise perilous areas.

Sec. 5. *Mandatory Additional Insurance Benefits for Journalists, and Employees of Media Entities on Field Assignments.* - In addition to the present insurance benefits provided to journalists and employees of media entities on field assignments by the Social Security System (SSS) as mandated under Republic Act No. 8282, otherwise known as the Social Security Law, and by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) under R.A. No. 8291, there shall be an additional insurance coverage to be provided by media entities to journalists and their employees on field assignments and front-line media persons which shall give the following minimum benefits:

1. Disability Benefits of Three Hundred Fifty Thousand Pesos (P350,000.00) for all mass media practitioners who shall suffer total or partial disability, whether permanent or temporary, as a result of any injury sustained during performance of duty;
2. Death benefits amounting to Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (P300,000.00) for all mass media practitioners and employees on field assignment who shall perish in the line of duty; and
3. Reimbursement of actual medical costs up to Two Hundred Thousand Pesos (P200,000.00) for all mass media practitioners and employees on field assignments who shall be hospitalized or who shall require medical assistance for injuries sustained while in the performance of duty.

The media entity shall have the option of selecting the insurance company and shall be responsible for paying the insurance premiums for their journalists and employees.

*Sec. 6. Insurance for Freelance Journalists.* - The SSS and GSIS shall create a special insurance program for freelance journalists that shall include, among others, a coverage of risks incurred while working in war zones, conflict-stricken areas, and calamity-affected places.

*Sec. 7. Grant of Hazard Pay.* - All qualified journalists, employees of media entities on field assignments and freelance journalists deployed in calamity-affected places, strife-torn or embattled areas, distressed or isolated stations, prison camps, mental hospitals, radiation-exposed clinics, laboratories or disease-infested areas or in areas declared under state of calamity or emergency for the duration thereof which expose them to great danger, contagion, radiation, volcanic activity/eruption, occupational risks or perils to life shall be compensated with hazard pay equivalent to at least twenty-five percent (25%) of their gross monthly basic salary for the duration 28 of such deployment.

*Sec. 8. Tax Exemption and Non-Diminution of Benefits.* - Hazard pay for journalists, employees of media entities on field assignments and freelance journalists shall not be subject to tax and nothing in this Act shall be construed as to diminish, in any manner, any benefit granted by existing laws, rules and regulations and other 33 issuances especially favorable to said journalists and employees of media entities.

*Sec. 9. Prohibited Acts.* - The following acts shall be prohibited:

(a) Refusal or failure by a media entity to provide additional insurance coverage referred to in Section of this Act;

(b) Refusal or failure by a media entity to provide hazard pay referred to in Section 7 of this Act;

(c) Refusal by an insurance company to enrol journalists, employees of mass media entities on field assignment and freelance journalists on account of the nature of their work; and

(d) Non-compliance with the rules and regulations that the GSIS, SSS, and PIA shall adopt for the implementation of this Act.

*Sec. 10. Penal Provisions.* - Any person who shall wilfully commit any of the prohibited acts enumerated under this Act shall, upon conviction, be punished by a fine not less than Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (P300,000.00) but not more than Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (P500,000.00) or imprisonment of not less than one (1) year but not more than six (6) years or both depending upon the discretion of the court.

Provided, that if the offender is a public official, in addition to the penalties stated in the preceding paragraph, the penalty of perpetual disqualification from office shall be imposed.

In the case of associations, partnerships or corporations, the penalty shall be imposed on the partner, president, chief operating officer, chief executive officer, directors or officers responsible for the violation, and cancellation of registration with the SEC.

*Sec. 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations.* - The GSIS, SSS, PIA, in consultation with the NPC, NUJP, KBP and other duly registered media associations, shall promulgate and issue the rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this Act.

*Sec. 12. Repealing Clause.* - All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees, presidential proclamations, letters of instructions, rules and regulations or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Sec. 13. *Separability Clause.* - If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, other parts or provisions hereof not affected shall continue to be in full force and effect.

Sec. 14. *Effectivity Clause.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

*Approved,*