

**NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES**  
First Regular Session

)  
) '22 SEP 19 P1:09  
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**SENATE**

RECEIVED BY: 

**S. B. NO. 1323**

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Introduced by **SENATOR JOEL VILLANUEVA**

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**AN ACT  
EXEMPTING QUALIFIED INDIGENTS FROM THE PAYMENT OF  
PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION FEES AND FOR OTHER  
PURPOSES**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

Education and self-development are the cornerstones of progress for the country. The 1987 Philippine Constitution affirms this as it clearly states that “the State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development” (Article II, Sec. 17).

Laws like Republic Act No. 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Education Act are admirable governmental efforts to recognize the importance of education for the less privileged and institutionalizes free tuition and exemption from other fees in state universities and colleges and local universities and colleges. In 2019, we also passed Republic Act No. 11261 or the First Time Jobseekers Act to give fee waivers for first time jobseekers when they apply for government documents that are usually required for first time job applicants.

However, aside from the financial burden in applying for a job, some graduates must still undergo professional examinations, which also places additional burden on graduates, especially indigent ones. For instance, the fee for the coming 2022 Philippine Bar exams is Php10,000.00.<sup>1</sup> This is on top of the many other expenses these barristers have to shoulder during the review months before the exam.

This bill seeks to provide the missing link in terms of assistance in facilitating the employment of graduates. In addition to free tertiary education and waivers of

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<sup>1</sup> March 31, 2022. 2022 Bar: Applications to start on June 13; sched back to November. PhilStar. Retrieved from: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/05/31/2185058/2022-bar-applications-start-june-13-sched-back-november> (date last accessed: September 6, 2022)

fees for applicable government documents, this bill grants qualified indigents free fees for professional examinations, upon presenting a certification of indigence from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). In recognizing that poverty should not be a hindrance to self-development and achieving one's goal of having a better life for themselves and their family, this bill seeks to give a boost to indigent students by not having to worry about paying the examination fees anymore.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Villanueva', with a blue circular stamp or mark to its right.

**SENATOR JOEL VILLANUEVA**

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**PURPOSES**

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

1           **SECTION 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the "Free Professional  
2 Examinations Act."  
3

4           **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is the declared policy of the State to  
5 promote full employment and to provide equal employment opportunities for all. It is  
6 likewise the policy of the State to promote a just and dynamic social order that will  
7 free the people from poverty through policies and programs that provide adequate  
8 social services and improve the quality of life for all. Pursuant to this, efforts should  
9 be made to ease the financial burden of aspiring professionals in the payment of  
10 professional and other examination fees.  
11

12           **SEC. 3. Definition of Terms.** – For purposes of this Act, the following words  
13 shall mean:  
14

15 a) **Professional Examination** refers to the licensure examination conducted by  
16 Professional Regulations Commission (PRC) and other certifying bodies of the  
17 government as a prerequisite to the issuance of a license to engage in a  
18 profession. It shall also include the examination administered by the Civil  
19 Service Commission (CSC) to qualify certain persons for government service;  
20 and  
21

22 b) **Qualified Indigent** refers to a person who has no visible means of income or  
23 support, or whose income is insufficient for the subsistence or basic needs of

1 his/her family, as may be determined by the Department of Social Welfare and  
2 Development (DSWD).  
3

4 **SEC. 4. Requirements for Availment.** – For purposes of availing the benefits  
5 of this Act, an examinee shall secure a certification from the DSWD that he/she is a  
6 qualified indigent. Such certification shall be presented to the PRC, CSC or other  
7 certifying body, as the case may be, in lieu of the payment of examination fees;  
8 Provided, that a first time applicant may be entitled to 100% of the examination fees;  
9 Provided, further, that in the event that the examinee needs to retake the  
10 professional examination, he/she shall only be entitled to assistance equivalent to  
11 50% of the examination fee for the second take, and no other subsidy shall be given  
12 for further retake.  
13

14 In the implementation of this Act, the DSWD shall also enter into an  
15 appropriate memorandum of agreement and coordinate with the Supreme Court and  
16 the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) for the proper implementation of this Act.  
17 For this purpose, the DSWD, the Supreme Court and the IBP shall issue the  
18 implementing rules and regulations to carry out the purposes of this Act.  
19

20 **SEC. 5. Reportorial Requirements.** – For purposes of determining the  
21 effectiveness and social impact of the provisions of this Act, an Inter-Agency  
22 Committee (Committee) is hereby created with the Secretary of the DSWD as  
23 Chairperson and the heads of the PRC, CSC and other relevant agencies, the  
24 participation of which is deemed necessary by the Committee. The Committee shall  
25 submit an annual report, not later than June 30 of each year, to the President of the  
26 Philippines and to the appropriate committees of both Houses of Congress, on the  
27 status of implementation of this Act, including the challenges encountered in the  
28 process of its implementation. Such report shall also include, as much as possible,  
29 the number of applicant-beneficiaries who took the Bar examinations administered  
30 by the Supreme Court.  
31

32 The committee shall monitor the compliance of the concerned government  
33 agencies and may recommend to the proper authorities the filing of an administrative  
34 complaint against any person who refuses to comply with the provisions of this Act.  
35

36 **SEC. 6. Interpretation in Favor of the Applicant.** – In all cases, any  
37 ambiguity in the interpretation of the provisions of this Act shall be in favor of the  
38 applicant. No agency shall issue unduly restrictive regulations which will render  
39 nugatory the benefits provided under this Act. Such shall constitute an administrative  
40 offense punishable under the Administrative Code and other pertinent laws.  
41

42 **SEC. 7. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Campaign.** –  
43 The Committee, in coordination with the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) and the  
44 IBP, shall conduct regular information, education and communication (IEC)  
45 campaigns in order to inform potential beneficiaries of the procedures and guidelines  
46 in availing the benefits of this Act. As far as practicable, such IEC campaigns shall  
47 be made available in print, television, radio broadcast and online platforms, with  
48 appropriate translation into regional languages.  
49

50 **SEC. 8. Non-Duplication of Benefits.** – Examinees who are already

1 receiving similar benefits under other laws and programs of the government shall not  
2 be entitled to the benefits of this Act. However, nothing herein shall diminish or  
3 decrease the benefits being received by the beneficiaries under pertinent laws, rules  
4 and regulations.

5  
6 **SEC. 9. *Exceptions.*** – The waiver of fees under this Act shall not include  
7 those collected in connection with an application to take other examinations, such as  
8 specialization examinations administered by professional organizations, and the fees  
9 relating to the application for a driver’s license.

10  
11 **SEC. 10. *Non-Authority to Charge Fees.*** – This Act shall not be construed  
12 as an implied authority for government agencies to impose or collect charges and  
13 fees in the discharge of their functions with regard the administration of professional  
14 examinations, if no such authority is already granted under their respective charters  
15 or other relevant laws.

16  
17 **SEC. 11. *Appropriations.*** – An amount necessary for the initial  
18 implementation of this Act shall be charged against the respective budgetary  
19 allocations of the concerned government agencies, subject to the usual budgeting,  
20 accounting and auditing rules and regulations. Thereafter, an amount necessary for  
21 the proper implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General  
22 Appropriations Act.

23  
24 **SEC. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).*** – In addition to the  
25 rules to be formulated as provided under Section 4 of this Act, the Committee, upon  
26 proper consultation with relevant stakeholders, shall also formulate the rules and  
27 regulations for the effective implementation of this Act, within ninety (90) days from  
28 its effectivity.

29  
30 **SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.*** – If any provision of this Act is declared  
31 unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected by such declaration shall  
32 remain in full force and effect.

33  
34 **SEC. 14. *Repealing Clause.*** – Any law, decree, ordinance or administrative  
35 circular not consistent with any provision of this Act is hereby amended, repealed or  
36 modified accordingly.

37  
38 **SEC. 15. *Effectivity Clause.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after  
39 its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general  
40 circulation.

41  
42 Approved,