

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



'22 DEC 14 A9:13

**SENATE**  
S. No. 1610

RECEIVED BY:

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Introduced by **Senator Raffy T. Tulfo**

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**AN ACT**  
**PROMOTING ACCESS TO QUALITY LEGAL EDUCATION BY PROVIDING FOR**  
**FREE TUITION AND OTHER SCHOOL FEES IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND**  
**COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution declares that the State shall protect and promote the rights of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. For this purpose, the Congress enacted the "Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017" (Republic Act No. 10931) which provided free tertiary education to *bona fide* students in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) regardless of the program or course they are enrolled. Law students, however, are ineligible to avail the free tertiary education under this law as they are already bachelor's degree holders.

In top private legal educational institutions, it costs around Php75,000.00 – Php98,000.00 per semester to study law, while tuition fees in state universities range from Php24,000 to Php30,000.00, excluding all the living expenses and other necessities.

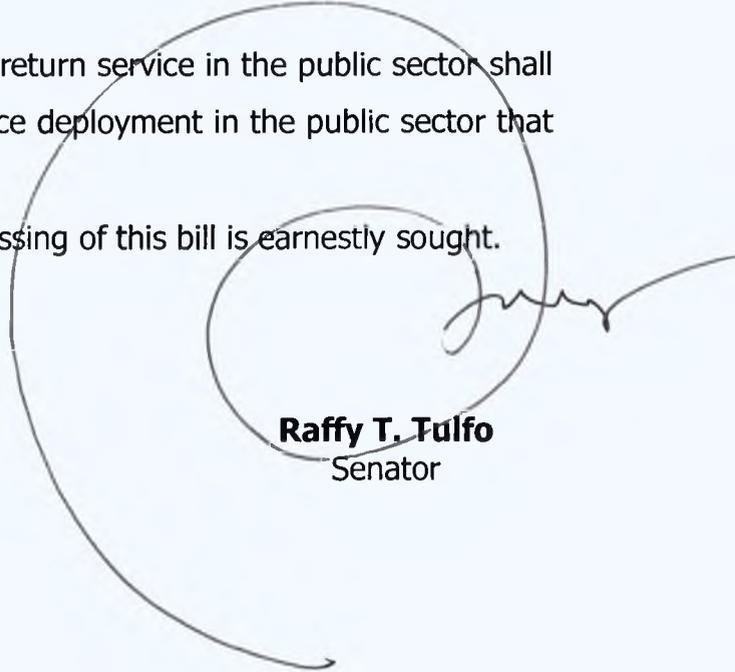
One of the reasons for lack of access to justice in the Philippines is the shortage of practicing lawyers. At present, there are only around 40,000 attorneys comprising the Integrated Bar of the Philippines – even fewer are practicing lawyers. That

translates to one lawyer serving roughly 2500 people, very far from the ideal ratio of one lawyer for every 250 persons.

This measure seeks to ensure that law students will have access to legal education in the SUCs and at the same time increase the workforce of the legal profession.

In addition, the requirement to render return service in the public sector shall pave the way for a sustainable human resource deployment in the public sector that is critical for the nation's justice system.

In view of the foregoing, the urgent passing of this bill is earnestly sought.



**Raffy T. Tulfo**  
Senator

NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE )  
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22 DEC 14 A9:14

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

1           Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Free Legal Education  
2 Act of 2023”.

3           Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to provide  
4 appropriate legal measures for the protection of human rights of all persons within  
5 the Philippines, as well as Filipinos residing abroad; offer economic assistance to the  
6 underprivileged and marginalized sectors; deliver free legal services to indigent  
7 litigants, and address the lack of and unavailability of legal practitioners in the different  
8 government agencies in the country.

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

1           Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – The following terms shall be defined  
2 conceptually as they are used throughout the statute:

3           1) *Legal Education* refers the totality of various academic programs in  
4 higher education designed for the training of prospective lawyers, allied  
5 professionals and legal scholars. It shall encompass the basic and  
6 graduate law programs, and other legal studies programs;

7           2) *Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)* refers to an educational institution,  
8 private or public, undertaking operations of higher education program/s  
9 with an organized group of students pursuing defined studies in higher  
10 education, receiving instructions from teachers, usually located in a  
11 building or group of buildings in a particular site specifically intended for  
12 educational purposes. The following are the classifications of Higher  
13 Education Institutions:

14           a. Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) are institutions  
15 incorporated as stock or non-stock corporations and supervised and  
16 regulated by the Commission on Higher Education, except for the law  
17 program;

18           b. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are those created by special  
19 laws or charters, governed by their respective board of regents or  
20 board of trustees, chaired by the CHED Chairperson according to RA  
21 8292; and

22           3) *Legal Education Institutions (LEIs)* refers to all higher education  
23 institutions accredited by the Legal Education Board to offer basic and/or  
24 graduate law programs, allied legal studies programs and/or other legal  
25 studies programs and recognized by the Commission on Higher  
26 Education (CHED), when applicable.

27           Sec. 4. *Establishment of Free Legal Education Program in SUCs.* – There shall  
28 be established a Free Legal Education Program for deserving students in SUCs. All  
29 qualified Filipino students who are either currently enrolled in the Juris Doctor Program  
30 offered in SUCs at the time of the effectivity of this Act, or shall enroll at any time  
31 thereafter, after passing the entrance examination and other admission and retention

1 requirements of the said SUCs, shall be exempt from paying tuition and other school  
2 fees for units enrolled in.

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

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

9 Sec. 5. *Qualifications and Requirements.* – In order to be qualified for the  
10 Free Legal Education Program, a law student must comply with the following  
11 requirements:

- 12 1) Must be a Filipino Citizen residing in the Philippines;
- 13 2) Must be a student taking up *Juris Doctor* degree in an SUC;
- 14 3) Must sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of the  
15 scholarship on a form that shall be prescribed by the LEB;
- 16 4) Must carry full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC, and  
17 shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which will result in  
18 underloading;
- 19 5) Must finish the entire *Juris Doctor* degree within the prescribed time  
20 frame of the SUC where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention  
21 policies of the SUC; *Provided*, That a scholar who is already enrolled, may  
22 be allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, to file a leave of absence;
- 23 6) Must take the bar examination within a maximum period of one (1) year  
24 after completion of the *Juris Doctor* degree;
- 25 7) Must render return service as provided under Section 14 of this Act.

26 Sec. 6. *Coverage.* – The Free Legal Education Program shall cover the  
27 following:

- 28 1) Tuition fees at the rate approved by the SUC governing board as of date  
29 of passage of this Act;
- 30 2) Government-mandated bar examination and licensure fees; and
- 31 3) Other school fees including but not limited to:

- 1 a. Fees for prescribed books, on a reimbursement basis, as determined
- 2 by the LEB, upon consultation with its stakeholders;
- 3 b. Student registration fees; and
- 4 c. Library fees.

5 *Sec. 7. Ineligibility.* – The following students are ineligible to avail of the Free  
6 Legal Education:

- 7 1) Students who have already attained a Bachelor of Laws or a *Juris Doctor*
- 8 degree from any legal education or institution.
- 9 2) Students who fail to comply with the admission and retention policies of
- 10 SUCs.
- 11 3) Students who fail to complete their *Juris Doctor* degree within the period
- 12 prescribed in the program.

13 Students who are ineligible to avail of the Free Legal Education Program shall  
14 be charged the tuition and other school fees as determined by the governing Board  
15 of the SUCs.

16 *Sec. 8. Harmonization with the Clinical Legal Education Program.* – Pursuant  
17 to Section 5(5), Article VIII of the 1987 Constitution, the Supreme Court is empowered  
18 to adopt and promulgate rules through the amendment of the provisions of Rule 138-  
19 A or the Revised Law Student Practice Rule of the Rules of Court.

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

26 *Sec. 9. Harmonization with the UniFAST Act.* – Pursuant to Republic Act No.  
27 10687, the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) is the  
28 existing system to unify and harmonize all publicly-funded national government  
29 programs for Student Financial Assistance Programs, including but not limited to  
30 scholarships, grants-in-aid, and student loans for tertiary education.

31 As the repository of all government-funded modalities of Student Financial  
32 Assistance Programs for tertiary education in both public and private institutions, the

1 UniFAST is mandated by law to implement the disbursement of student financial  
2 grants including the Free Legal Education Program, the latter in coordination with the  
3 LEB, which shall provide UniFAST with validating data or information on the currently  
4 enrolled registered law students per semester.

5           Sec. 10. *Prohibited Acts.* – Upon effectivity of this Act, it shall be unlawful  
6 for any SUC, or any person or entity representing an SUC, to collect tuition and other  
7 school fees from qualified law students during the registration or enrollment period.  
8 Provided, that this provision shall not apply to law students who voluntarily opt out of  
9 the subsidy or are otherwise ineligible to avail of the provisions of this Act.

10           Sec. 11. *Penalties.* – A commission of any prohibited act defined under the  
11 next preceding section shall subject the SUC to an administrative case under the  
12 jurisdiction of the LEB, and shall result in the imposition of the appropriate  
13 administrative sanction, including but not limited to: (a) downgrading of the  
14 government recognition; (b) phase-out of the law program; and (c) termination of the  
15 law program.

16           This is without prejudice to the civil or criminal liability of the party  
17 responsible therefor.

18           Sec. 12. *Reporting Requirements.* – All SUCs shall submit to the UniFAST and  
19 the LEB, within five (5) days after the last day of registration for each semester, a  
20 report detailing the names of law students eligible for free tuition and other school  
21 fees of the institution, under this Act.

22           SUCs shall submit a report to the LEB and UniFAST before the start of an  
23 academic year on the projected number of enrollees for each academic year set by  
24 the respective governing boards of SUCs. Before the start of each academic year, the  
25 SUCs shall submit a report to the LEB and UniFAST on their projected number of  
26 enrollees as determined by their respective governing boards for the purpose of  
27 implementing the disbursement of student financial grants.

28           Sec. 13. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the  
29 implementation of this Act shall be included in the current year's appropriation of the  
30 UniFAST.

1           Thereafter, the amount necessary for the continuous implementation of the  
2 Free Legal Education Program provided under this Act shall be included in the UniFAST  
3 appropriations in the annual General Appropriations Act.

4           *Sec. 14. Mandatory Return Service.* – Within four (4) years upon passing the  
5 bar examinations and conferment of the license to practice the legal profession, a  
6 scholar shall render mandatory return service for two (2) years in the Public Attorney’s  
7 Office or any government agency lacking lawyers as may be determined by the LEB;  
8 *Provided,* That the lawyer shall receive appropriate salaries and other benefits for  
9 service rendered under the mandatory return service.

10           Any scholar who fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service  
11 the service obligation imposed under this Act shall be required to reimburse the  
12 Government the full cost of scholarship, including other benefits and expenses  
13 received under this Act.

14           *Sec. 15. Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within one hundred twenty  
15 (120) days from the effectivity of this Act, the LEB as lead, in coordination with the  
16 CHED, UniFAST, DBM, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges  
17 (PASUC), Association of Local Colleges and University (ALCU), Philippine Association  
18 of Law Schools (PALS), Association of Law Students (ALSP), shall formulate and issue  
19 the rules and regulations to fully implement the provisions of this Act.

20           *Sec. 16. Separability Clause.* – Should any part or provision of this Act be  
21 determined to be unconstitutional or invalid, the other parts or provisions not affected  
22 thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

23           *Sec. 17. Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and  
24 regulations and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of  
25 this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

26           *Sec. 18. Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its  
27 publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

28 Approved,