

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

23 MAY 24 P12 :59

SENATE

RECEIVED BY: _____



S. No. 2239

Introduced by **SENATOR CYNTHIA A. VILLAR**

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR A SYSTEM OF EARLIER VOTING FOR QUALIFIED SENIOR
CITIZENS, PREGNANT WOMEN, AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OF
THE PHILIPPINES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

At the core of our Philippine democracy is the Constitutionally guaranteed right to vote, known as suffrage. As stated in Article V, Section 1 of our Constitution, "All Filipino citizens, unless disqualified by law, can exercise the right to vote." This embodies the principle "*salus populi suprema est lex*", or "the welfare of the people is the supreme law." The right to vote is the heartbeat of our democracy, giving the people a voice and a means to hold our leaders accountable.

While voting is a crucial part of democracy, certain groups, such as the senior citizens, pregnant women, and people with disabilities, encounter difficulties in participating due to the tough, overcrowded voting process that doesn't consider their unique needs and situations. The current system, largely designed for those without these challenges, may not fully address the specific needs of these groups. This situation could unintentionally limit their full engagement in the electoral process and their active contribution to our country's political future.

Article XIII, Section 11 directs us to prioritize the needs of the elderly, disabled and women. We are also guided by our innate Filipino culture of 'Bayanihan', which prioritizes care and support for the most vulnerable among us.

Hence, this proposed Act seeks to introduce advance voting for senior citizens, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities. This would let these groups vote seven days before the actual election, avoiding the regular voting process that often puts them at a disadvantage.

The aim of this Act is to make our elections more inclusive, to improve political representation, and to empower everyone in our society. By encouraging more participation, we're making our democracy stronger and taking a step towards a Philippines where everyone's voice is heard.

Hence, the immediate approval of this bill is earnestly sought.



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

1 Section 1. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State
2 to make voting convenient for senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs) by
3 giving them the option to vote earlier than the date set for the election.

4 Sec. 2. *Early Voting.* - For national and local elections, there shall be early
5 voting where qualified senior citizens and PWDs may choose to cast their ballot at
6 accessible establishments designated by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC)
7 within seven (7) working days before the date set for the elections.

8 Sec. 3. *Registration.* - There shall be a nationwide registration for senior
9 citizens and PWDs to qualify them to avail of this early voting privilege. Those who
10 are not registered under this Act shall vote on Election Day.

11 Sec. 4. *Obligations of the COMELEC.* - To ensure the effective
12 implementation of this Act, the COMELEC shall:

13 a) Keep a record of senior citizens and PWDs who are registered voters;

- 1 b) Design a registration system, in coordination with local government units,
2 the National Council on Disability Affairs, the Commission on Human
3 Rights, the Department of Health and the Department of Interior and
4 Local Government, that allows senior citizens and PWDs to register and
5 opt for early voting;
- 6 c) Ensure that polling places are safe and accessible to senior citizens and
7 PWDs, and properly fitted with the necessary communication, visual and
8 physical aids, as mandated under Republic Act No. 10366 entitled, An Act
9 Authorizing the Commission on Elections to Establish Precincts Assigned
10 to Accessible Polling Places Exclusively for Persons with Disabilities and
11 Senior Citizens"; and
- 12 d) Mount an intensive information campaign on early voting for qualified
13 senior citizens and PWDs.

14 Sec. 5. *Appropriations.* - The initial amount for the implementation of this Act
15 shall be charged against the current year's appropriations of the COMELEC.
16 Thereafter, the funding of which shall be included in the Annual General
17 Appropriations Act.

18 Sec. 6. *Applicability of Other Laws.* - The provisions of Batas
19 Pambansa Blg. 881 or the Omnibus Election Code; Republic Act No. 7166, entitled,
20 "An Act Providing for Synchronized National and Local Elections and for Electoral
21 Reforms, Authorizing Appropriations Therefor, and for Other Purposes"; and other
22 election laws not inconsistent herewith shall be applied to facilitate early voting for
23 qualified senior citizens and PWDs.

24 Sec. 7. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* - Within ninety (90) days from
25 its effectivity, the Commission shall promulgate the rules and regulations for the
26 implementation of this Act.

27 Sec. 8. *Separability Clause.* - If any provision of this Act is declared
28 unconstitutional or invalid, any part or provisions hereof not affected thereby shall
29 continue to be in full force and effect.

1 Sec. 9. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and
2 regulations or parts thereof which are contrary or inconsistent with this Act are
3 hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

4 Sec. 10. *Effectivity.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its
5 publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general
6 circulation.

Approved,