

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1387

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Introduced by Congressman Alfredo D. Vargas III

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Children below six years old are mostly unaware of what a "normal" vision is. Thus, they are unlikely to complain of vision problems. Since vision is closely linked to a child's learning process, undetected learning-related vision problems may lead to trouble with the student's schoolwork.

Early detection of vision problems is very important and has a considerable impact on the life of the student. Poor vision in childhood affects performance in school and may have a negative effect on the future of the child. A vision problem noticed at the stage of adolescence may lead to more serious eye disorders, like blindness, if left untreated. Thus, early detection is very important as it will open up a better set of opportunities for the student.

This bill seeks to establish a national vision screening program for kindergarten pupils. Vision screening is an efficient and cost-effective method to identify children with visual impairment or eye conditions. This initiative also aims to create a referral system in order for visually impaired students to be checked for further evaluation and treatment.

For these reasons, approval of this bill is earnestly sought.


ALFREDO D. VARGAS III

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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL VISION SCREENING PROGRAM FOR KINDERGARTEN
PUPILS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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 “National Vision Screening Act”.

Section 2. **Declaration of Policy.** – Pursuant to Article II, Section 15 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them. In line with this policy, the State shall endeavor to promote every Filipino’s full potential through good vision by creating ways and means to address vision problems, including blindness, among children.

Towards this end, the State shall institute a program that will help screen the school children for visual problems.

Section 3. **Establishment of a National Vision Screening Program.** – A National Vision Screening Program (NVSP) is hereby established under the Department of Education (DepEd) which is primarily intended to screen the eye vision of kindergarten pupils.

Section 4. **Program Objectives.** – The objectives of the NVSP are:

- (a) To conduct a simple vision screening test on kindergarten pupils through trained teachers and identify pupils with possible visual problems;
- (b) To identify early childhood visual problems;
- (c) To provide immediate attention to visually impaired kindergarten pupils and create a referral system so that they may be checked and treated by eye care practitioners;
- (d) To develop a vision screening results database for all kindergarten pupils and;
- (e) To conduct continuing research on the state of visual impairment among kindergarten pupils.

Section 5. **Program Implementation.** – The DepEd shall lead the implementation of the NVSP, in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI), which is under the National Institutes of Health of the University of the Philippines (UP).

In the implementation of the NVSP, the DepEd shall:

- (a) In coordination with the DOH and the PERI, administer the vision screening program to all public kindergarten pupils using a Vision Screening Kit which includes charts with symbols or numbers, occluders, and transparent response key: *Provided*, That the DOH and PERI may recommend to adopt new modes or methods of vision screening based on the latest trends and developments;
- (b) In coordination with the DOH and PERI, shall train and certify teachers in conducting a vision screening program;
- (c) In consultation with the DOH and PERI, develop a system of referral and corrective measures of kindergarten pupils who are suspected or diagnosed to have possible eye ailments;
- (d) Create a vision screening database containing the results of the screening per child and visual conditions diagnosed by the eye care practitioners; and
- (e) Monitoring and evaluate the implementation of the NVSP.

Section 6. **Philhealth's Benefit Package.** – The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) shall develop a benefit package for the consultation and treatment of eye diseases of children.

Section 7. ***Vision Screening Training.*** – The PERI shall be mainly responsible for training of Vision Screening Trainers for purposes of quality assurance. It shall likewise recommend the appropriate Vision Screening material to be used.

Section 8. ***Research.*** – The DOH and the PERI shall conduct research and provide evidence-based recommendations to the DepEd on matters pertaining to the NVSP. Furthermore, the PERI shall perform continuing research on childhood related eye vision ailments.

Section 9. ***The Vision Screening Continuing Research Fund.*** – There is hereby created a Vision Screening Continuing Research (VSCR) fund to be sourced from any donation or bequest made to the DepEd or DOH in favor of the NVSP. The VSCR Fund shall be used to fund the PERI for its continuing research program on childhood related eye vision ailments.

Section 10. ***Tax Exemption.*** – Any donation or bequest made to the DepEd, DOH, or PERI for the NVSP and for the VSCR Fund shall be exempt from donor's tax and the same shall be considered allowable deduction from the gross income of the donor, in accordance with the provisions of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended: *Provided*, That the donation is duly approved by the DepEd, DOH, or UP.

Section 11. ***Appropriations.*** – The amount currently appropriated in the General Appropriations Act for related activities under the DepEd and DOH shall be allocated and utilized for the initial implementation of this Act. Thereafter, such amount as may be necessary for the NVSP's implementation, including continuing research, shall be included under the budget of the DepEd and DOH in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 12. ***Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the DepEd, in consultation with the DOH, PERI and other participating government agencies, shall formulate the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of this Act.

Section 13. ***Separability Clause.*** – If any provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions not so declared shall remain in force and effect.

Section 14. ***Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, decrees, orders and rules and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

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

Approved,