

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Batasan Hills, Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL No. 2094

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Introduced by **ACT Teachers Party-List**
Rep. ANTONIO L. TINIO and **Rep. FRANCE L. CASTRO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Deaf children break the barriers to communication by learning language through a natural sign language in formal education. Filipino Sign Language (FSL), a natural sign language indigenous to the Filipino Deaf community, has its own grammar and linguistic structure. FSL is learned without effort from interactions of Filipino Deaf children with other Deaf children and the Deaf community. Research shows that exposure to native users of FSL facilitates the learning of the Filipino Deaf: they develop language and acquire conversational skills easily. Deaf children are proven to have increased chances of developing self-esteem and higher competencies for college and employment if the primary medium of instruction is their first language (a visual language), which can then be used as a bridge to other languages.

However, Philippine schools at the primary and secondary levels have mainly used the Signing in Exact English (SEE) and/or Sign Supported Speech, which are artificial sign systems based on oral and written English. Recently, Undersecretary Yolanda Quijano of the Department of Education declared that "Signing Exact English (SEE) is the official sign language to be used in deaf education and training of SPED instructors and...the method of instructions will be both oral and [written]."

The Filipino Deaf community strongly believes that this current practice is inconsistent with previous issuances of the Department and a major violation of the rights of Deaf persons under the 1987 Constitution and international instruments, mainly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities


(UNCRPD, adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008). Under Article 24 (3) of the UNCRPD, the Philippine government is obliged to facilitate the learning of the official sign language, promote the linguistic and cultural identity of the Deaf community, and ensure that Deaf education is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication. Article V, Section 1.4.1 of the 1997 Policies and Guidelines in Special Education (SPED) states that "Filipino Sign Language shall be used in the education of the [Deaf]" while Department Order 74, series of 2009 mandates the use of the learner's first language as the primary medium of instruction and literacy.

The exclusion of the Filipino Deaf in the educational system continues throughout the rest of their lives and in all aspects of society—they are effectively deprived of their rights to basic social services (especially health and medical assistance), information and communication, access to public services and transactions, and participation in the justice system.


This proposed measure seeks to realize the rights of the Filipino Deaf to full and equal participation in society by enabling the acquisition of life and social development skills through the use of FSL as the language of instruction, in an environment which respects their identity and distinct capabilities. It also seeks to ensure that all executive policies are consistent with the law as abovestated. Furthermore, with its directive to all government agencies to ensure the Filipino Deaf access to all public transactions, services, and facilities through the use of FSL as the medium of official communication, this bill seeks to give effect to the State's obligations under international law to progressively realize the rights of the Filipino Deaf to inclusion, accessibility, expression, and access to justice, particularly through Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

This bill was unanimously approved on Third Reading during the 15th and 16th Congresses.

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



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ACT Teachers Party-List



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AN ACT
DECLARING FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE AS THE NATIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE OF THE
FILIPINO DEAF AND THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF GOVERNMENT IN ALL
TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING THE DEAF, AND MANDATING ITS USE IN SCHOOLS,
BROADCAST MEDIA, AND WORKPLACES

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

Section 1. Title. This Act shall be known as "*The Filipino Sign Language Act.*"

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. The State shall, in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. The national and local state agencies shall uphold respect for their inherent dignity, individual autonomy, and independence by guaranteeing accessibility and eliminating all forms of discrimination in all public interactions and transactions, thereby ensuring their full and effective participation and inclusion in society. The State shall also take all appropriate measures to ensure that the Filipino deaf can exercise the right to expression and opinion. Accordingly, the State recognizes and promotes the use of sign languages embodying the specific cultural and linguistic identity of the Filipino deaf.

Section 3. *Filipino Sign Language as the National Sign Language.* The Filipino Sign Language, hereinafter referred to as FSL, is hereby declared as the national sign language of the Philippines. The FSL shall be recognized, promoted, and supported as the medium of official communication in all transactions involving the deaf, and the language of instruction of deaf education, without prejudice to the use of other forms of communication preferences.

Section 4. *Filipino Sign Language in Education.*

(a) Medium of Instruction and Curriculum. The Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and all other national and local government agencies involved in the education of the deaf, are tasked to henceforth use FSL as the medium of instruction in deaf education. The FSL shall also be taught as a separate subject in the curriculum for deaf learners. The reading and writing of Filipino, as the national spoken language, other Philippine languages, and English shall also be taught to deaf learners.

(b) FSL in Early Childhood Care. All early childhood care and development programs provided by the government shall enable age-adequate FSL acquisition to pre-school age deaf children and their families.

(c) Deaf Teachers. To promote the licensing and mobilization of deaf teachers, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) is directed to employ alternative assessment procedures which shall consider the conditions, abilities, and social barriers of the deaf teachers. Said procedures shall be language-appropriate and culturally sensitive to the needs of the deaf teachers.

In the hiring and deployment of teachers in formal and non-formal education programs, DepEd and all other concerned national and local agencies are directed to employ affirmative action in recruiting deaf teachers.

(d) FSL in Teacher Training Programs for Deaf Education. The FSL shall be taught as a separate subject in the curriculum of training programs for teachers in deaf education.

(e) Training and Evaluation Programs. To improve the quality of teachers in deaf education, all national and local government agencies and centers providing education services to deaf students are hereby tasked to undertake periodic training and evaluation of their teachers. Training and evaluation shall be designed and taught in consultation with the representatives of the Filipino deaf community.

The University of the Philippines (UP), together with the *Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino* (KWF), professional linguistics researchers, in collaboration with the CHED, the DepEd, and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, shall develop guidelines for the development of training materials in the education of the

deaf for use by all state universities and colleges (SUCs), as well as their teachers and staff.

Section 5. *Standards for Filipino Sign Language Interpreting.* The National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA), with the involvement of the deaf community and other stakeholders, shall establish a national system of standards, accreditation, and procedures for FSL interpreting.

Section 6. *Filipino Sign Language in the Justice System.* The FSL shall be the official language of legal interpreting for the deaf in all public hearings, proceedings, and transactions of the courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and other tribunals. To ensure effective access to justice for the Deaf on an equal basis with others and to facilitate their effective role as direct and indirect participants in the legal system, courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and other tribunals are hereby mandated to ensure the availability of a qualified sign language interpreter in all proceedings involving the deaf, without prejudice to the right of the deaf to choose other forms or modes of communication, if they so prefer.

For purposes of this Act, "hearings, proceedings, and transactions" shall include those in police stations and before the *Lupong Tagapamayapa*, as well as preliminary investigations and other initial stages in the courts, quasi-judicial bodies, and other tribunals.

The Supreme Court and other concerned agencies shall promote appropriate training for those working in the administration of justice, including hearing and deaf relay interpreters, other court personnel, and police and prison staff.

The Department of Justice (DOJ), the NCDA, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Judiciary, with the involvement of the deaf community and other stakeholders, are tasked to create a national system of standards, accreditation, and procedures for legal interpreting in FSL.

Section 7. *Filipino Sign Language in All Workplaces.* The FSL shall be the official language of the Filipino deaf employed in the civil service and in all government workplaces. For this purpose, all government offices shall take reasonable measures to encourage the use of FSL among its deaf and hearing employees, including the conduct of awareness and training seminars on the rationale and use of FSL.

The UP, together with the KWF, NCDA, professional linguistics organizations and deaf linguistics researchers, shall formulate guidelines for the development of training materials for the employees of the DOJ, the Judiciary, the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), in the conduct of the mandates and activities of these concerned offices.

Section 8. *Filipino Sign Language in the Health System.* State hospitals and health centers shall take steps to ensure access of the deaf to health services, including the free provision of FSL interpreters and other forms of communication, upon request of deaf patients. AS part of their corporate social responsibility, private health facilities are encouraged to provide access to health services to all deaf patients and their family members.

Section 9. *Filipino Sign Language in All Other Public Transactions, Service, and Facilities.* All national agencies including government-owned or -controlled corporations (GOCCs), and local government units (LGUs) are hereby directed to use FSL as the medium of official communication in all public transactions involving the deaf. Qualified FSL interpreting and other forms of communication shall be provided whenever necessary or requested during for a, conferences, meetings, cultural events, sports competitions, community affairs, and activities conducted by government agencies and GOCCs.

Section 10. *Filipino Sign Language in Broadcast Media.* The FSL shall be the language of broadcast media interpreting. To guarantee access to information and freedom of expression of the Filipino deaf, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) shall, within one year from the effective date of this Act, require FSL interpreter insets in news and public affairs programs. Subsequently, the NTC shall take steps to promote the use of FSL in all other broadcasts and programming, especially in educational television programs designed for children.

The NCDA and the *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (KBP), with the assistance of the NTC, the deaf community, and other stakeholders, are tasked to create a national system of standards, procedures, and accreditation for broadcast media interpreting in FSL.

Section 11. *Promotion of Filipino Sign Language.* The DepEd, CHED, UP, KWF, Linguistic Society of the Philippines, and other national agencies and LGUs shall, in consultation with professional organizations experienced in language policy and planning and the deaf community, take appropriate steps to propagate sign language competency among hearing people, especially families with deaf members, by offering FSL as an elective subject in the regular or mainstream curriculum.

SUCs are directed to undertake continuing research for the development, propagation, and preservation of FSL.

Section 12. *Instructional Materials for Schools and Child Development Centers.* The DepEd Instructional Materials Council Secretariat shall, in coordination with the Bureau of Curriculum Development and Bureau of Learning Delivery, as well as the ECCD Council, develop guidelines for the selection, production, procurement, and distribution of print and video materials in FSL to all public schools and national child development centers. Seventy-five percent of all procurement contracts shall be

reserved for deaf people's organizations, including regional or provincial enterprises and cooperatives run by the deaf and recognized by the LGUs.

Section 13. *Implementing Rules.* The Executive Director of the NCDA, in coordination with the Secretary of Education, the Chairperson of the CHED, the Director General of the TESDA, the Chairperson of the PRC, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Secretary of Justice, and the heads of other relevant agencies, and in consultation with representatives of the deaf community, teachers with knowledge and experience with the use of FSL in deaf education, the academe, interpreters, and other persons concerned, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act within one hundred eighty days after its effective date. These rules and regulations shall be published in accessible formats in the respective websites of these agencies and through other means necessary.

Section 14. *Monitoring of the Implementation of this Act.* The NCDA, in collaboration with representatives of the deaf community, is hereby tasked to convene an Inter-Agency Committee including the CHR, the CWC, the PCW, individuals and institutions with knowledge and experience on FSL and its use, to make an annual assessment of the implementation of this Act. The report of this Inter-Agency Committee shall be transmitted annually to the House Committee on Social Services and the Senate Committee on Social Justice, Welfare and Development and shall be published in accessible formats in the respective websites of the concerned agencies and through other means necessary.

Section 15. *Appropriations.* The initial funding of this Act shall be taken from the current year's appropriations of the concerned agencies. Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 16. *Separability Clause.* If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 17. *Repealing Clause.* All laws, decrees, letters of instruction, executive issuances, resolutions, orders, or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

Section 17. *Effective Date.* This Act shall take effect fifteen days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or one newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,