

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES
First Regular Session
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Bill No. 3222

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Introduced by REPRESENTATIVE PIA S. CAYETANO

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Eye disorders or ailments are usually diagnosed and addressed only in the adolescent or adult stage. But unknown to many, these problems can be detected and resolved at an early stage with the help of simple diagnostic tests and non-surgical procedures.

Vision screening tests are simple methods used to identify children who have, or are at risk of, developing eye problems. It is deemed to be more efficient since it can identify numerous eye problems such as strabismus, cataract, glaucoma, amblyopia and other refractive errors. It is also cost-effective because instead of undergoing a comprehensive examination, the student is just required to look at a penlight or flashlight, or to read a chart specifically made for vision screening.

According to the Philippine Eye Research Institute (PERI), one (1) in twenty (20) pre-schoolers and one (1) in four (4) school-aged children have an eye problem. Furthermore, more than ten percent (10%) of young children have visual acuity problems, including errors of refraction (EOR) and amblyopia, even higher than the five to ten percent (5-10%) of the United States and Europe. Because children cannot, by themselves, identify that they have eye problems, studies recommend that vision screening should ideally be conducted for children starting at age three (3).

The Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology likewise emphasizes the importance of normal eye alignment during infancy and childhood since poor vision at this stage affects the child's performance in school, or the way he or she interacts with the community. Leaving this disorder untreated may lead to more serious eye problems and sometimes, even blindness.

Among all our senses, the sense of sight is the most abused and neglected. Hence, it is important that vision screening tests be conducted at an early stage to prevent complications in the future. This is thus a call for the Department of Health, the Department of Education and all related institutions to collaborate and establish a centralized and organized program for vision screening tests.

For the reasons aforementioned, approval of the Bill is urgently sought.

Pia S. Cayetano
PIA S. CAYETANO
2nd District of Taguig City

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Introduced by REPRESENTATIVE PIA S. CAYETANO

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:

1 **SECTION 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “*National Vision*
2 *Screening Act.*”

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

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

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

15 **SEC. 4. Program Objectives.** - The objectives of the NVSP are:

- 16 (a) To conduct a simple vision screening test on kindergarten pupils through
17 trained teachers and identify pupils with possible visual problems;
- 18 (b) To identify early childhood visual problems;
- 19 (c) To provide immediate attention to visually impaired kindergarten pupils
20 and create a referral system so that they may be checked and treated by
21 eye care practitioners;

1 (d) To develop a vision screening results database for all kindergarten
2 pupils; and

3 (e) To conduct continuing research on the state of visual impairment among
4 kindergarten pupils.

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

9 In the implementation of the NVSP, the DepEd shall:

10 (a) In coordination with the DOH and the PERI, administer the vision
11 screening program to all public kindergarten pupils using a Vision Screening Kit
12 which includes charts with symbols or numbers, occluders, and transparent
13 response key. *Provided*, That the DOH and PERI may recommend to adopt new
14 modes or methods of vision screening based on the latest trends and
15 developments;

16 (b) In coordination with the DOH and PERI, shall train and certify teachers
17 in conducting the vision screening program;

18 (c) In consultation with the DOH and PERI, develop a system of referral
19 and corrective measures for kindergarten pupils who are suspected or diagnosed to
20 have possible eye ailments;

21 (d) Create a vision screening database containing the results of the
22 screening per child and visual conditions diagnosed by the eye care practitioners;
23 and

24 (e) Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NVSP.

25 The private schools shall be encouraged to adopt their own system of vision
26 screening for kindergarten pupils enrolled in their respective schools, subject to
27 standards under the NVSP.

28 **SEC. 6. PhilHealth's Benefit Package.** - The Philippine Health Insurance
29 Corporation (PhilHealth) shall develop a benefit package for the consultation and
30 treatment of eye diseases of children.

31 **SEC. 7. Vision Screening Training.** - The PERI shall be mainly responsible for
32 training of Vision Screening Trainers for purposes of quality assurance. It shall
33 likewise recommend the appropriate Vision Screening material to be used.

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

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

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

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

18 For kindergarten pupils enrolled in private schools, the funding needed for
19 the implementation of their respective school's vision screening program shall be
20 assumed by the private schools concerned.

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

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

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

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

Approved,