AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR URBAN AND COUNTRYSIDE GREENING IN THE PHILIPPINES THROUGH MANDATORY TREE PLANTING AND ADOPTION OF A FOREST SANCTUARY BY PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Explanatory Note

In 2018, the World Risk Report ranked the Philippines third among the countries with the highest disaster risk. Recognized to be one of the most vulnerable countries to potential dangerous consequences of climate change such as increasing frequency and/or severity of droughts, fires, floods and storms, damage to ecosystems, and biodiversity loss, it is indeed high time for the Philippine archipelago and the local communities to be the voice of the vulnerable by addressing these challenges through pursuing green growth in preventing and reducing the adverse impacts of climate change.

The increase of carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere contributes to global warming and climate change. As reported by NASA, Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is an important heat-trapping (greenhouse) gas, which is released through human activities such as deforestation.¹

Trees and forests act as effective carbon sinks and also help improve air quality. According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, a single tree can sequester 0.56 metric tons of carbon dioxide in its lifetime.² Thus, integrating tree-planting in our environmental agenda is a must and encouraging the youth, as the most active partners in challenging development norms, to actively participate in this cause will strengthen our initiatives towards the greening of urban and the countryside in the Philippines.

This measure seeks to empower the youth as effective catalysts for change, as well as the academe as the best medium to disseminate information, as they adopt or create forest sanctuaries or gardens both in urban areas as well as in the

¹ https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/
countryside. With more than twelve million students in the public school sector planting trees the whole year round, the country’s forests can surely be revived in the shortest time possible. More than the actual number of trees we plant, what is more important is to instill in the minds of present and future generations that we have to save the environment while there is still time.

In light of the foregoing considerations, the immediate passage of this measure is sought.

ORIGINAL SIGNED
LOREN B. LEGARDA
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Be it enacted in the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Title. – This Act shall be known as the “Forest Sanctuaries Act of 2019.”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. – Recognizing the vital role of trees and plants in ecological stability, it is hereby declared the national policy to ensure sufficient greenery in urban and countryside areas and to promote the right of the people to a balanced and healthy ecology.

SEC. 3. Scope. – This Act shall apply to all barangays, municipalities, cities, and provinces, particularly in all public parks and public school grounds in urban and rural areas, idle public lands, unless otherwise identified to be used for other purposes, and privately-owned land whose proprietors voluntarily subject their properties to the provisions of this Act, upon the creation of appropriate agreements with the schools implementing this Act.
SEC. 4. Objectives. – Pursuant to the policy declared herein, it is the objective of this Act:

(a) To build, adopt, develop and maintain forest parks or sanctuaries by public elementary and secondary schools;

(b) To require the planting of trees and shrubbery as well as provision of financial, physical, and technical support by national agencies and local government units;

(c) To promote environmental consciousness by encouraging active participation in tree-planting activities in the community, especially among students, youth, other civic action groups, and the academe; and

(d) To protect trees from harmful human activity and increase the country’s forest cover.

SEC. 5. National Forest Sanctuary Committee. – A National Forest Sanctuary Committee is hereby created with the Secretary of the Department of Education (DepEd) as Chairman and the respective secretaries of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Department of Agriculture (DA) as members.

The National Forest Sanctuary Committee shall promulgate the pertinent rules and regulations as may be necessary to fully implement the objectives and purposes of this Act not later than ninety (90) days after the approval of this Act.

The National Forest Sanctuary Committee shall convene every quarter to hear the reports or performance from the Regional Committees.

SEC. 6. Specific Functions of the Executive Department. – The DENR shall provide the technical, scientific, and physical support in: 1) determining of the
suitable species of trees and provision of seeds or samplings to be planted in
existing forest/mangrove sanctuaries or areas where a forest/mangrove sanctuary or
urban garden is to be established, 2) classifying and determining of existing
forest/mangrove sanctuaries, proposed forest/mangrove sanctuaries and urban
gardens, and 3) tree planting activities.

The Local Government Units (LGUs) shall: (1) in partnership with DENR and DA, aid
in the determination of suitable areas for the proposed forest/mangrove
sanctuaries/urban gardens, (2) mobilize all concerned local agencies and
communities to ensure prompt and effective implementation of this Act in all public
schools within their jurisdiction, (3) mobilize non-government organizations,
foundations and other private entities or corporations to provide financial, physical or
other kinds of support for the implementation of this Act, and (4) effect the
apprehension for the consequent prosecution of all persons violating the penal
provisions of this Act;

The DILG shall coordinate all local government units to ensure prompt and effective
implementation of this Act;

The DOT shall assist in the conceptualization and site-evaluation and cooperate in
the maintenance or creation of forest/mangrove sanctuaries and urban gardens and
provide additional funding from its resources;

The DA shall aid in the determination of suitable areas for the proposed
forest/mangrove sanctuaries/urban gardens and provide the technical and scientific
support i.e. the necessary tools, equipment, and manpower to effect the
implementation of this Act; and
The DepEd, as lead agency of this Act, shall coordinate all tree-planting activities of all public elementary and high schools and integrate the tree-planting activities into the school curriculum to promote environmental consciousness. It shall also undertake relevant projects for the promotion of these activities.

SEC. 7. Tree Planting Guidelines. – Tree Planting in duly qualified areas shall comply with the following guidelines:

(1) Considering the classification and condition of the soil and the total land area of the site, suitable species of forest trees or fast-growing trees shall be planted in the identified areas;

(2) In cases where multiple trees can be planted, the trees should be planted in clusters not more than four (4) meters apart from one another

(3) The DepEd and DENR shall facilitate and supervise all the tree planting activities and the consequent maintenance of the same within its jurisdiction. The government agencies concerned shall perform their duties and responsibilities as indicated in Section 6 of this Act.

SEC. 8. Prohibited Acts. – All forest/mangrove parks or sanctuaries or urban gardens established under this Act shall be protected and maintained by all concerned public schools, the DENR, DepEd, and other government agencies and local governments. These forest/mangrove sanctuaries shall not be cut or destroyed, except when the cutting and destroying of the same is necessary for public safety.

SEC. 9. Penalties. – Any person found guilty of violating Section 8 of this Act shall be punished with imprisonment of not less than six (6) months to not less than one (1) year or a fine not less than Three Thousand Pesos (P3,000.00) to not more than Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000.00), or both imprisonment and fine, at the discretion of the court.
SEC 10. Submission of Reports. – The National Forest Sanctuary Committee shall, within ninety (90) days after the approval of this Act, submit periodic reports to both houses of Congress of the Philippines.

SEC. 11. Funding. – The fund needed for the implementation of this Act shall be taken from any available appropriation in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) of the year of its implementation; Provided, that funds for this purpose shall also be included in every annual GAA; Provided further, that there shall be equitable and proportionate appropriations of funds annually for this purpose for all barangays, municipalities, cities and provinces. In addition, adequate portions of financial grants and concessional loans extended by foreign governments and multilateral agencies every year, the amount to be determined by the President, shall be allocated to augment the annual appropriations until this Act is fully implemented.

SEC. 12. Separability Clause. – All laws, decrees, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 13. Effectivity Clause. – This Act shall take effect upon its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,