The 1987 Constitution encouraged decentralization to grant greater autonomy to local government units (LGUs) in recognition of their right to self-government, to make them self-reliant, and to improve their administrative and technical capabilities.\(^1\) To realize these aspirations, the Constitution mandates the national government to ensure that decentralization contributes to the continuing improvement of the performance of local government units and the quality of community life.

More than twenty-eight (28) years after the advent of Republic Act (RA) 7160 or the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, a meaningful decentralization of power in favor of LGUs is yet to fully accord the genuine enjoyment of local autonomy. While broader powers were conferred to the LGUs to create their own sources of revenue and were guaranteed their just share in the national taxes collected by the National Government, the exercise of powers particularly those for the general welfare remain constricted by national laws and policies that tend to limit rather than grant greater autonomy to LGUs in recognition of their right to self-government, make them self-reliant, and improve their administrative and technical capabilities.\(^3\)\(^4\) This prevented LGUs from truly exercising their right to self-government and address the different needs of their constituents. Hence, there is a need to further foster genuine and meaningful local autonomy by strengthening the delegated power of LGUs under Section 16 of the LGC, which embodies the general welfare clause.

Concomitantly, central to the exercise of the powers conferred under Section 16 of the LGC are the local sanggunians to whom the legislative powers and whose membership is characterized by constituent representation. In the case of the sangguniang panlalawigan, R.A. 7160, as amended, fixes the number of regular members based on the classification of the province determined via the income level prescribed by the Department of Finance. Specifically, Section 41(b) of R.A. 7160, as amended by R.A. 8553, provides:

"(b) The regular members of the sangguniang panlalawigan, sangguniang panlungsod, and sangguniang bayan shall be elected by district as follows:

"First and second-class provinces shall have ten (10) regular members; third and fourth-class provinces, eight (8); and fifth and sixth-class provinces, six (6): xxx. (Emphasis supplied)

Notably, fifth and sixth-class provinces only have six (6) regular members in their respective sanggunians. On the other hand, municipalities have a minimum of eight (8) regular members in their sangguniang bayan. Given the relatively larger constituency which sangguniang panlalawigan members represent, this condition alone makes a lot of sense to increase the number of regular seats in the sangguniang panlalawigan.

The present number of regular seats was first provided for in R.A. 6636, as amended by R.A. 6637. The determination of the number of seats was basically tied up with the income classification of the province. However, population is an indispensable component which cannot simply be ignored. After all, the purpose of electing members of the sangguniang panlalawigan is representation. Thus, under Section 41(b) of R.A. 7160, as amended, provinces with more than five (5) legislative districts were apportioned two (2) sangguniang panlalawigan members for each district.

The population of the Philippines in 1987 was about 57.313 million.² Understandably, the previous apportionment of sanggunian representation under R.A. 6636, as amended, was influenced by income and population levels at that time. After more than three decades, however, the country's population has grown to 108.713 million³ as of 27 November 2019. Obviously, a corresponding increase of representation in the sangguniang panlalawigan is logical.

In representation terms, the larger number of representatives translate to a greater voice for the constituents represented. The district constituents would have more members speaking for them and voting in the sanggunian. Therefore, the increase in the number of regular seats cannot but be a quantitative and proportional improvement in the representation of constituents in the sangguniang panlalawigan.

The proposed increase in number of regular members in the sangguniang panlalawigan offer greater and more representative choice for voters. It assures better representation for ventilating, articulating and crystalizing issues affecting government administration and obtaining solutions thereto. It also enhances initiatives that promote development of the districts they represent and secure the general welfare of their constituencies.

Support for this bill is, therefore, earnestly requested from my colleagues.

REP. JOSE ENRIQUE S. GARCIA III
Second District, Bataan

² https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/philippines/population; last accessed on 29 October 2019.
AN ACT
FURTHER STRENGTHENING THE AUTONOMY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS,
AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 16 AND SECTION 41 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO.
7160, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE “LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991”

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

SECTION 1. Section 16 of Republic Act No. 7160 is hereby amended to read as follows:

"SEC. 16. General Welfare. – Every local government unit shall exercise
the powers expressly granted, those necessarily implied therefrom, as well as
powers necessary, appropriate, or incidental for its efficient and effective
governance, and those which are essential to the promotion of the general
welfare. Within their respective territorial jurisdictions, local government units
shall HAVE, TO THE EXTENT NECESSARY, FULL POWERS AND
AUTHORITY TO ADOPT ORDINANCES THAT SHALL ensure [support],
among other things, the preservation and enrichment of culture, promote health
and safety, enhance the right of the people to a balanced ecology, encourage
and support the development of appropriate and self-reliant scientific and
technological capabilities, improve public morals, enhance economic prosperity
and social justice, promote full employment among their residents, maintain
peace and order, and preserve the comfort and convenience of their inhabitants.
FOR THIS PURPOSE, NATIONAL LAWS PROVIDING FOR POLICIES AND
REGULATIONS COVERING THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS SHALL BE
UNDERSTOOD AS PRESCRIBING ONLY THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS
AND SHALL BE WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
UNITS’ POWER TO IMPOSE STRICTER POLICIES AND REGULATIONS
WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE JURISDICTIONS TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVE
AND MEANINGFUL PRESERVATION OF THE GENERAL WELFARE.”

SEC. 2. Section 41(b) of Republic Act No. 7160, as amended by Republic Act No. 8553,
is hereby further amended to read as follows:
“(b) The regular members of the sangguniang panlalawigan, sangguniang panlungsod, and sangguniang bayan shall be elected by district as follows:

“First and second-class provinces shall have NOT MORE THAN [ten (10)] FOURTEEN (14) regular members; third and fourth-class provinces, NOT MORE THAN [eight (8)] TWELVE (12); and fifth and sixth-class provinces, NOT MORE THAN [six (6)] TEN (10): Provided, That, in provinces having more than five (5) legislative districts, each district shall have NOT MORE THAN [two (2)] THREE (3) sangguniang panlalawigan members[, without prejudice to the provisions of Sec. 2 of Republic Act No. 6637. Sangguniang barangay members shall be elected at large. The presidents of the leagues of sanggunian members of component cities and municipalities shall serve as ex officio members of the sangguniang panlalawigan concerned. The presidents of the liga ng mga barangay and the pederasyon ng mga sangguniang kabataan elected by their respective chapters, as provided in this Code, shall serve as ex officio members of the sangguniang panlalawigan, sangguniang panlungsod, and sangguniang bayan].

“ALL CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES SHALL CONTINUE TO HAVE THEIR RESPECTIVE NUMBER OF ELECTIVE MEMBERS AS PROVIDED IN EXISTING LAWS.

“Sangguniang barangay members shall be elected at large. The presidents of the leagues of sanggunian members of component cities and municipalities shall serve as ex officio members of the sangguniang panlalawigan concerned. The presidents of the liga ng mga barangay and the pederasyon ng mga sangguniang kabataan elected by their respective chapters, as provided in this Code, shall serve as ex officio members of the sangguniang panlalawigan, sangguniang panlungsod, and sangguniang bayan.”

SEC. 3. The sangguniang panlalawigan concerned shall determine the number of additional members to be elected taking into consideration the population and the availability of funds of the province. Once increased pursuant to this Act, the number of sangguniang panlalawigan members shall not thereafter be reduced.

SEC. 4. The apportionment of the increased number of regular seats in the sangguniang panlalawigan shall continue to be governed by the provisions of Section 3 of Republic Act No. 7166.

SEC. 5. The election of the additional regular members of the sangguniang panlalawigan as provided for in this Act shall be held in the next local elections following the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 6. The Department of the Interior and Local Government and the Commission on Elections shall separately issue appropriate rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 7. If, for any reason, any part or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 8. All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or part or parts thereof contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.
SEC. 9. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.