

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)



16 AUG -1 P5:40

SENATE
S.B. No. 966

BY:

Introduced by: Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" A. Aquino IV

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Have you ever had a dream where you were screaming for help and nobody could hear you?

For the over half a million members¹ of the Filipino deaf community, this nightmare is their daily reality. Many deaf individuals are largely isolated from society, with very limited access to public information, and few communication channels where they are wholly understood.

To this day, much of Philippine society remains to have little knowledge and understanding of the needs of the deaf community. Many teachers and interpreters have been well-trained in Filipino Sign Language and have excellent signing skills, being able to express ideas to deaf persons. On the other hand, FSL interpreters' receptive skills are less developed, leaving the deaf community unable to be fully understood (National Sign Language Committee Report, 2004).

To build a safer and more inclusive society for the Filipino deaf community, government, civil society, academe, and the private sector must work together to give deaf individuals access to communication, information, and tools that are necessary to lead productive lives. Thus, this representation appeals for the urgent passage of the Filipino Sign

¹ 1 Based on 2009 estimated by the National Statistical Office (NSO), sourced from a presentation by the Gualandi Volunteer Service Programme, Inc., February 2014.

Language (FSL) Act of 2016, which shall declare Filipino Sign Language as the national sign language of the Filipino deaf and the official language of the Philippine government in all transactions with the deaf, and which shall likewise mandate the use of FSL in schools, workplaces, and broadcast media.

Moreover, this Act provides for FSL to be the medium of official communication in all transactions involving the deaf and the language of instruction of deaf education. It shall also 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, as well as in all public and private workplaces, and in all other public transactions, services, and facilities.

To make information more accessible in broadcast media, this Act also requires 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.

Under this proposed Act, 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. Likewise, the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and other national and local agencies shall take appropriate steps to propagate sign language competency among hearing people, by offering FSL as an optional language subject in the regular or mainstream curriculum, among others.

These policies would lead to meaningful changes in the lives of the deaf community. A deaf abuse victim could accurately express their case in a courtroom. A deaf student would be better able to understand lessons with a teacher using FSL in class, and the community would be better informed about current events with FSL interpreters in TV insets interpreting the news around the country.

We fervently believe that a humane, just, and inclusive society protects the vulnerable, integrates the marginalized, breaks down the barriers of discrimination, and gives equal access to opportunity for every Filipino. Mandating and promoting the use of FSL, we believe, is a step toward social justice for the Filipino deaf community.

In view of the foregoing, the approval of this bill is earnestly sought.

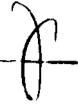


Senator Paolo Benigno "Bam" A. Aquino IV

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

2 **SECTION 1. Title.** - This Act shall be known as "*Filipino Sign Language Act.*"

3 **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** – The State shall promote, protect, and ensure the full
4 and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with
5 disabilities. Thus, national and local state agencies shall uphold respect for their inherent
6 dignity, individual autonomy, and independence by guaranteeing accessibility and
7 eliminating all forms of discrimination in all public interactions and transactions, thereby
8 ensuring their full and effective participation and inclusion in society. The State shall also
9 take all appropriate measures to ensure that the Filipino deaf can exercise the right to
10 expression and opinion. Accordingly, the State recognizes and promotes the use of sign
11 languages embodying the specific cultural and linguistic identity of the Filipino deaf.

12 The State shall also ensure that all schools use Filipino Sign Language in teaching
13 deaf learners, in accordance with the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 and the Early
14 Childhood Care and Development law which designates the child's first language as the
15 medium of instruction. Filipino deaf children can learn best and most comfortably and
16 effectively in an environment that recognizes and respects who they are, one that uses their
17 native first language—a true visual language, which is a system historically and distinctively
18 their own. Such a language would not only produce highly successful learners but would also
19 respect their rights to identity, access to education, and direct communication, among
20 others.

1 **SEC. 3. Filipino Sign Language as the National Sign Language of the Filipino deaf.** –
2 Filipino Sign Language, hereinafter referred to as FSL, is hereby declared as the national sign
3 language of the Philippines. As such, it shall be used as the medium of official
4 communication in all transactions involving the deaf and the language of instruction of deaf
5 education.

6 **SEC. 4. Standards for Filipino Sign Language Interpreting.** – The National Council for
7 Disability Affairs (NCDA), in coordination with government agencies and accredited private
8 organizations representing the deaf community, shall establish a national system of
9 standards, accreditation, and procedures for FSL interpreting including but not limited to:

- 10 (a) Education;
- 11 (b) Legal proceedings;
- 12 (c) Public and Private Workplaces;
- 13 (d) Public Health System;
- 14 (e) Public Transactions, Services and Facilities; and
- 15 (f) Broadcast media.

16 **SEC. 5. Establishment of an FSL Inter-Agency Committee.** – The NCDA, in
17 coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education
18 (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and all other
19 national and local government agencies involved in the use of FSL must establish a
20 committee that shall monitor and evaluate the nationwide use of FSL, especially in the areas
21 mentioned in Section 4 of this Act.

22 They shall also collaborate with accredited academic institutions, government and
23 non-government organizations in the creation of training guidelines and materials necessary
24 for the use of FSL in their respective agencies. This Committee shall work with the respective
25 departments involved in the creation and implementation of FSL training programs specific
26 to their agencies. This Committee shall also have the power to hire, train and employ
27 professional representatives from the deaf community to do the training, monitoring and
28 evaluation of the nationwide FSL use.

29 **SEC. 6. FSL Interpreting Training and Materials.** –

30 (a) Assessment Procedures- To promote the licensing of deaf teachers who use FSL,
31 the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) is directed to employ affirmative action
32 measures by administering alternative assessment procedures which shall consider the
33 conditions and abilities of the deaf and be language-appropriate and culture-fair to deaf
34 education graduates.

1 (b) Hiring and Deployment- In the hiring and deployment of teachers in formal and
2 non-formal education programs, DepEd and all other concerned national and local agencies
3 are directed to employ affirmative action in recruiting deaf individuals who use FSL.

4 (c) Curriculum- FSL shall be included as a separate subject in the curriculum of
5 training programs for teachers in deaf education.

6 (d) Materials - Instructional Materials for Schools and Child Development Centers.
7 The DepEd Instructional Materials Council secretariat shall, in coordination with the Bureau
8 of Elementary Education, Secondary Education, and Alternative Learning Systems, as well as
9 the Early Childhood Care and Development Council, develop guidelines for the selection,
10 production, procurement and distribution of print and video materials in FSL to all public
11 schools and national child development centers. Seventy-five percent (75%) of all
12 procurement contracts shall be reserved for deaf peoples' organizations, including regional
13 or provincial enterprises and cooperatives run by the deaf and recognized by local
14 government units.

15 **SEC. 7. Filipino Sign Language in Education.** – The Department of Education
16 (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical education and Skills
17 Development Authority (TESDA), and all other national and local government agencies
18 involved in the education of the deaf, are tasked to henceforth use FSL as the medium of
19 instruction in deaf education.

20 The FSL shall also be taught a separate subject in the curriculum for deaf learners.
21 The reading and writing of Filipino, as the national spoken language, other Philippine
22 languages, and English shall also be taught to deaf learners. Private schools shall ensure
23 access to FSL materials or individualized instruction on FSL, if requested. All early childhood
24 care and development programs provided by the government shall enable age-adequate FSL
25 acquisition to pre-school age deaf children and their families.

26 **SEC. 8. Filipino Sign Language in Courts, Quasi-Judicial Agencies, and other**
27 **Tribunals.** – FSL shall be the official language of legal interpreting for the deaf in all
28 public hearings, proceedings, and transactions of the courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and
29 other tribunals. To ensure effective access to justice for the deaf on an equal basis with
30 others and to facilitate their effective role as direct and indirect participants in the legal
31 system, courts, quasi-judicial agencies, and other tribunals are hereby mandated to ensure
32 the availability of FSL interpreting in all proceeding involving the deaf, without prejudice to
33 the right of the deaf to choose other forms or modes of communication, if they so prefer.

34 The Supreme Court and other concerned agencies shall promote appropriate
35 training for those working in the administration of justice, including hearing and deaf relay

1 interpreters, and other court personnel, and police and prison staff. For purposes of this Act,
2 "hearings, proceedings, and transactions" shall include those in police stations and the
3 *Lupong Tagapamayapa*, as well as preliminary investigations and other initial stages in the
4 courts, quasi-judicial bodies, and other tribunals.

5 **SEC. 9. *Filipino Sign Language in All Public and Private Workplaces.*** – FSL shall be
6 the official language of the Filipino deaf employed in the public and private service. For this
7 purpose, every government office shall take all reasonable measures that would encourage
8 the use of FSL among its deaf and hearing employees, including the conduct of awareness
9 and training seminars on the rationale and use of FSL.

10 **SEC. 10. *Filipino Sign Language in the Public Health System.*** – State hospitals and
11 health centers shall take steps to ensure access of the Filipino deaf to health services,
12 including the free provision of FSL interpreters for deaf patients. As part of their corporate
13 social responsibility, private health facilities are encouraged to provide access to health
14 services to all deaf patients and their family member.

15 **SEC. 11. *Filipino Sign Language in All Other Public Transactions, Services, and***
16 ***Facilities.*** – As the medium of official communication, all national and local government
17 agencies are hereby directed to use FSL in all public transactions involving the deaf.
18 Qualified FSL interpreting and other forms of communication shall be provided whenever
19 necessary or requested during fora, conferences, meetings, cultural events, sports
20 competitions, community affairs, and activities conducted by government agencies and
21 government-owned and controlled corporations.

22 **SEC. 12. *Filipino Sign Language in Broadcast Media.*** – FSL shall be the official
23 language of broadcast media interpreting. To guarantee access to information and freedom
24 of expression of the Filipino deaf, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) shall,
25 within a reasonable period upon the effective date of this Act, require FSL interpreter insets
26 in news and public affairs programs. FSL interpreter in public video relay services (VRS)
27 system must be provided for any transactions. Subsequently, the NTC shall take steps to
28 promote the use of FSL in all other broadcasts and programming, especially in educational
29 television programs designed for children.

30 **SEC. 13. *Promotion of FSL.*** – The NCDA, with the national agencies and local
31 government units shall, in consultation with professional organizations experienced in
32 language policy and planning and the deaf community, take appropriate steps to propagate
33 sign language competency among hearing people, especially families with deaf members, by
34 offering FSL as an elective subject in the regular or mainstream curriculum. State universities
35 and colleges are directed to undertake continuing research for the development,
36 propagation, and preservation of FSL.

1 **SEC. 14. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – The NCDA, in coordination with the
2 DepEd, TESDA, PRC, DOJ, Supreme Court and other relevant agencies, and in consultation
3 with representatives of the deaf community, teachers with knowledge and experience in the
4 use of FSL in deaf education, the academe, interpreters, and other persons concerned, shall
5 promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act
6 within one hundred eighty (180) days from its approval.

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

11 **SEC. 16. *Repealing Clause.*** All laws and executive issuances inconsistent with the
12 provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

13 **SEC. 17. *Separability Clause.*** If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional,
14 the same shall not affect the validity and effectiveness of its other provisions.

15 **SEC. 18. *Effectivity.*** This Act shall take effect fifteen days after its publication in the
16 *Official Gazette* or any two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

17 *Approved,*