

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3664



Introduced by **ANG PROBINSYANO**
Party-List Representative Alfred Delos Santos

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution is explicitly clear about the State having to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.

Obviously, the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting the traditional means and modes of academic instruction and learning, just makes the fulfillment of this mandate all the more critical.

As of now, one of the best ways to carry out this responsibility is by securing stable, reliable internet connectivity for all students in the country.

Indeed, on June 22, 2020, it was reported to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee that internet connection is an incredible hurdle for students:

2) Internet connection

- Weak or no internet connection in low-income or far-flung barangays and no available smart-technology devices or gadgets in vulnerable communities to avail webinars and online sessions
- Not all microbusiness owners in Pateros have good internet access and they still opt to have physical interaction to easily raise their concerns and have it addressed immediately
- Difficulty in the conduct of program launching online with at least 100 pax/barangay
- Poor internet connections in most of the barangays, that's why the only option is to convene all participants in common place, and just limit the number of participants to 15

- There are recently confirmed cases in some areas, particularly in Echague, Isabela. Thus difficulty to do buy-in as the town is under GCQ
- Due to poor internet connection, there is a difficulty in conducting webinars, resulting to face to face encounter and increase in expenses for supplies and physical arrangements
- Conduct of online orientation and Business Development Activities is conducive only to urban barangays. Most rural barangays may not have mobile signal or have poor connection to mobile data. Using mobile data would also mean additional cost to them so imagine them spending for mobile data for more than one hour's worth of viewing? Further, NSB has been done face to face, and not thru online, if we are to go back to the program's objective which is to reach remote barangays.

It was shown that these problems still persists as recent as October 6, 2020:¹

Despite the effort that goes into printing materials, K-12 teachers are still expected to be available for consultations either online (usually through Facebook Messenger) or by text. This requires a laptop and an internet connection, which is out of reach for many public school teachers, whose starting monthly salary is PHP 22,000 (USD 420).

Many students, too, still need the internet to do supplemental research on more complex assignments. That's a problem, given a DepEd survey showing that, of the 6.5 million students who have access to the internet, approximately 20 percent use computer shops or other public places to go online. Worse, 2.8 million students have no way of going online at all. This is especially common in the rural areas where 53 percent of the population live and where both internet access and speed can be a challenge.

The southern Philippine province of Siargao, for example, lies within the areas that have the slowest internet connection. Provincial government data indicates that less than 30 percent of the student population have internet access and there are some 600 students in "off-the-grid schools," which includes schools in island villages that do not have electricity and are so remote that they can only be accessed by boat.

There, lack of in-person classes is having big effects. The 500 residents of the Halian island village in Siargao have electricity only from 6pm to 9pm. Teachers must travel to the nearest urban center via motorized boat to get printed modules. It is a voyage that can take up to two hours. "Most of the residents here are fisherfolk. Many do not have sufficient formal schooling and worry [about] how they will help their children answer these learning modules when their children probably know more than them," said village captain Elsa Tampos. Distance education cannot solve these geographical disparities.

In January 7, 2021, these problems remain unresolved:²

MANILA (Reuters) - Since the pandemic forced him into remote learning, 10-year-old Jhay Ar Calma has often had to climb on to the corrugated iron roof of his home in a poor neighbourhood of Manila to get an internet signal.

¹ <https://eu.boell.org/en/2020/10/06/philippines-distance-learning-reveals-digital-divide>

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-education-widerimage-idUSKBN29B31C>

Up on the roof, he sits on a broken plastic basin and hopes there'll be a signal strong enough for his government-issued device.

"Sometimes we change the SIM card to a different provider so he doesn't have to study on the roof, but there's rarely enough money to spare for that," Calma's mother Jonalyn Parulan told Reuters.

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In Laguna province, south of Manila, students trek up a mountain to get internet access, and have even built a hut to provide shelter when it rains and to sleep when they work late into the nights on assignments.

This situation is a far cry from the university life Rosemine Gonzaga, 19, had anticipated.

"I was really excited for college because all my life I've been here in the mountains," Gonzaga said, explaining how the pandemic had thwarted her plans for an independent life in the town.

Like many students in her community, she relies on a scholarship and fears she may lose it if she is unable to keep up with lessons. Still, Gonzaga is resolved to continue online classes rather than risk infection attending university.

"The pandemic is no reason for me to stop learning," she said.

Mark Joseph Andal, 18, who lives in San Juan, Batangas province, has taken a part-time job in construction to purchase a smartphone for virtual classes and has also built a forest shelter to capture an internet signal.

When the signal fades, Andal picks up his plastic chair to move to another spot, and if it rains, he holds the phone in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

Hence the need for this Bill. It shall mobilize the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), have it identify key areas where reliable cyber infrastructure shall be established, to then provide universal, comprehensive, reliable, and wireless internet connection for all.

It is for the foregoing premises that the approval of this Bill is earnestly sought.


ALFRED C. DELOS SANTOS
Representative, Ang Probinsyano Party-List

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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR A UNIVERSAL, COMPREHENSIVE, RELIABLE, AND
ACCESSIBLE WIRELESS INTERNET CONNECTION TO FACILITATE THE
DELIVERY OF DIGITAL EDUCATION AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Universal Wireless Internet Connection Act of 2022.”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – In recognition of the vital role of information and communications technology in nation-building, the State declares its policy to promote an environment for the development of infrastructure that would ensure the availability and accessibility to reliable and secure internet access suitable to the needs and aspirations of the nation. The State shall therefore institutionalize the delivery of education digitally by providing universal, comprehensive, reliable, and wireless internet connection for all.

SECTION 3. *Minimum Internet Speed Requirement.* – The National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) shall set the minimum standards of internet speed for compliance of all internet service providers (ISPs) in the country.

SECTION 4. *Universal Wireless Internet Connection Access.* – The NTC shall identify key areas where reliable cyber infrastructure shall be established. Such key areas shall be strategic locations which must be able to maximize internet connectivity reach throughout the country, especially in the rural areas where there is little to no cyber infrastructure available and accessible, so as to cater to the demands of the digital age.

SECTION 5. *Mechanisms for Free Student Internet Access.* – The NTC shall come up with a mechanism that will provide students free, fast, and reliable internet access.

SECTION 6. *Appropriations.* – The funds necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations of the Department of Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Department of Education (DepEd), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Thereafter, funding shall be included in the budgets of the DICT, DepEd, and CHED under the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 7. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within thirty (30) days after this Act takes effect, the DICT, through the NTC, DepEd, and CHED, in consultation and coordination with appropriate government agencies, representatives from the private sector, and other stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 8. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions or parts unaffected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 9. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees or issuances, letters of instruction, administrative orders, rules, and regulations contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SECTION 10. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,