

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 6802



Introduced by the Honorable Precious Hipolito Castelo

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Under Section 24 of Article II of the Constitution, it is provided that: "The State recognizes the vital role of communication and information in nation building". The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the relevance of this Constitutional provision. Now, more than ever, going digital is inevitable and necessary.

The UK-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and Facebook have conducted a study using the 2020 Inclusive Internet Index with 100 countries as participants. In said study, the Philippines obtained an overall ranking of 63rd, and 19th out of 26 nations in the Asia-Pacific region. It ranked 57th in the area of availability; 82nd in affordability; 59th in relevance and 59th in readiness.¹ The statistics are quite disappointing considering that Filipinos are proven to be heavy users of the Internet. In a report called Digital 2019, Filipinos are found to spend an average of 10 hours a day on the internet.² Despite this, the Philippines literally lags behind when it comes to the average global internet speed.

Inclusive internet availability and access is indispensable now that the whole world is forced to stay at home. It is an essential investment especially for the education sector which is largely affected due to the disruption of classes amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to err on the side of caution with this COVID-19 crisis by shifting to digital education instead of conducting face-to-face classes until a COVID-19 vaccine is made available to all Filipinos.

Thus, it is the intent of this bill to create a solid and robust Philippine cyberinfrastructure that will continuously deliver the connectivity that students need in this digital age. Reliable and fast internet connection must be accessible to all, much like electricity and clean water as basic human necessities.

The immediate passage of this bill is most earnestly sought.


PRECIOUS HIPOLITO CASTELO

¹ <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/03/03/1997646/philippines-ranks-63rd-inclusive-internet-index>

² <https://cnnphilippines.com/lifestyle/2019/02/01/2019-digital-hootsuite-we-are-social-internet-philippines-facebook.html>

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AN ACT

PROVIDING FOR A UNIVERSAL, COMPREHENSIVE, RELIABLE AND ACCESSIBLE WIRELESS INTERNET CONNECTION IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE DELIVERY OF DIGITAL EDUCATION AMID THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

Be it enacted by the Senate and 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 2020".

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

SEC. 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.

SEC. 4. *Universal Wireless Internet Connection Access.* – The NTC shall identify key areas where reliable cyber infrastructures 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 are little to no cyber infrastructures available and accessible in order to cater to the demands of the digital age.

SEC. 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.

SEC. 6. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within thirty (30) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), through the NTC, the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 7. *Appropriations.* – The funds necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations of the DICT, DepEd and CHED. Thereafter, funding shall be included in the budget of the DICT, DepEd and CHED under the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 8. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 9. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with, the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

SEC. 10. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,