



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Introduced by Representative Rufus B. Rodriguez*

House Bill No. 6280

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Philippines has between 120-180 native languages, incorrectly referred to by the general public as "dialects". They represent the rich linguistic heritage of our country and are fundamental to Filipino society and culture. Unfortunately, only one native language has received significant attention and support from the Commission on the Filipino Language, for most of its history, while many of our other languages are in decline. The purpose of this act is to achieve more balanced and equitable support for Philippine languages, ensure their survival, democratize Filipino language development, benefit from our multilingual attributes, and help safeguard the linguistic rights of all Filipinos, in the spirit of the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines mandates Congress to "establish a national language commission composed of representatives of various regions and disciplines which shall undertake, coordinate, and promote researches for the development, propagation, and preservation of Filipino *and other languages*" [emphasis added]. As a result, Republic Act 7104 was passed in 1991 to create the Commission on the Filipino Language (Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino), which has regulated Philippine languages since then.

Almost thirty years later, it is clear that the CFL in its existing form is no longer advantageous to the Filipino people's languages, nor the country as a whole. RA 7104 was crafted under very different conditions, characterized by: 1) a recent revolution; 2) widespread use of local languages; 3) a popular impression that having many languages was an obstacle to unity and development;<sup>1</sup> 4) the belief that a national language needed to be prioritized to combat colonialism, to enhance communication and social justice, and to strengthen Filipino identity;<sup>2</sup> and 5) that other Philippine languages would not be negatively affected by the national language.

<sup>1</sup> The idea that language diversity is an obstacle to peace is conjectural, not scientific truth. While there are examples of language differences causing tension and even conflict between two populations elsewhere, there are also examples of harmonious populations that speak multiple languages. It depends highly on cultural characteristics, relative status between the language groups, education level, socioeconomic level, and whether governments foster appreciation, tolerance, and goodwill for diversity. The extent to which languages help or hinder development is also highly contextual, and open to debate. There are examples of developed countries with one-language policies, and examples of developed countries with multilingual frameworks. Likewise there are low-income countries with either kind of framework. With regards to education, low and medium-income countries are actually at risk of poor educational outcomes and social instability if they do *not* offer a multilingual education system that includes learners' mother tongues, according to Save the Children and CfBT (see publication, "Closer to home: how to help schools in low- and middle-income countries respond to children's language needs," 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The supposed efficacy of replacing a dominant foreign language with a dominant native language to overcome colonial structures is based on speculative sociological *theory*, not fact. It can be argued that colonialism would be best fought with the upliftment of all Philippine languages, rather than just one. Or, language need not be politicized at all; nationalism and patriotism are possible without valorizing a particular language. Likewise, it can be argued that giving citizens the flexibility to use, learn, and receive government services (including education) in any of their mother tongues would uphold social justice better than officially supporting only one



Today, however, conditions are markedly different. We now know that: 1) Most Philippine languages, with the exception of Tagalog and a few others, are declining in terms of the percentage of speakers to the overall population; 2) Many Philippine languages are experiencing disruption in intergenerational transmission—that is, children are not learning their mother tongues from their parents as consistently as before; 3) Millions of Filipinos cannot speak their mother tongues with as much fluency and complexity as previous generations; 4) Millions of Filipinos are unaware of spelling and other writing conventions in their mother tongues, and are unable to write them beyond elementary level; 5) Numerous formerly active media and arts industries (newspapers, literature, music production) in regional languages are now dormant; 6) Some people believe, or have been conditioned to believe, that their own mother tongues are irrelevant, unsophisticated, and backward; and 7) At least one third of all Philippine languages are endangered, while several have already gone extinct. Some example languages that are declining in use, especially among youth: most Negrito languages (e.g. Ayta, Agta, Arta, Dumagat, etc.), Gaddang, Sambal, Itawis, Bolinao, Yogad, Ilongot, Ibanag, Cuyonon, Tagbanwa, Agutaynen, Mangyan languages, Romblon languages, Monobo languages, Butuanon, and even Chavacano, Pangasinan, Kampampangan, and some Bikol languages. Most of the declining languages in Luzon are being dominated by Tagalog, while the declining languages in Visayas and Mindanao are being replaced mostly by Cebuano, Hiligaynon, or Tagalog, depending on the area.

Coupled with the changing sociolinguistic environment has been a growing understanding of the value of all languages. Languages, no matter how small, are important to humanity. Each language offers a unique way to communicate, a unique medium for the creation and transmission of literature, song, and other forms of expressive art, a unique window into a society's psychology, unique interpretations of the world around us, and encodes collective knowledge accrued by the language group over millennia. In addition to recognizing the importance of each language, is a growing awareness of the rich potential of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in general. Countries and individuals that know many languages, can not only be economically competitive, but can also enjoy a range of social, cognitive, environmental, and even health benefits. The key prerequisite for a country's languages to benefit its speakers, and the country as a whole, is a government that enables people to learn, speak, and receive information in their native languages, provides opportunities for people to learn other languages (local or foreign), encourages tolerance, respect, and appreciation for linguistic diversity, and creates mechanisms for people to advance their socio-economic status and general wellbeing through their own mother tongues. Hence the United Nations, through General Assembly declarations, committee reports, and UNESCO publications, recommends that countries safeguard their diversity, respect basic linguistic rights, protect all their citizens' mother tongues, and integrate their mother tongues in important sectors such as education, the justice system, and other arenas. Inclusive and pro-multilingual policies go hand-in-hand with sustainable development. The United Nations has chosen to highlight the importance of native languages by declaring 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

The Philippines is not alone in having native languages in decline. But as other countries take strong measures to protect their minority languages, the Commission on the Filipino Language has not only failed to stop the decline of Philippine languages, it is likely contributing to their eventual demise. While it has conducted some minor initiatives for local and regional Philippine languages, it has repeatedly exposed bias towards one language (*de jure*, Filipino; *de facto*, Tagalog), and a concomitant lack of interest, commitment, and even respect for Filipinos' other languages. The evidence is as follows:

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native language. See Koenig, M. (Ed., 2001) "The Human Rights of Linguistic Minorities and Language Policies"; Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2004) "The right to mother tongue medium education – the hot potato in human rights instruments"; and UNESCO (2012) "Why Language Matters for the Millennium Development Goals".



- The Commission on the Filipino Language (CFL) has never drafted or initiated a law to protect and promote our 120-180 native Philippine languages.
- The CFL has never drafted or initiated a law for the revitalization of vulnerable, threatened, or endangered Philippine languages.
- The CFL has never drafted or initiated a law to guarantee, recognize, or even promote linguistic rights for Filipino citizens, such as the right to use and learn one's first language, the right to information in one's first language, the right to learn other languages, and ethnolinguistic groups' right to preserve, protect, and develop their own languages.
- For most ancient Philippine writing systems (e.g. Kulitan, Buhid, Badlit, Haninuo, Jawi, Kirim, and others), with the exception of Baybayin, the CFL has not implemented programs towards their research, preservation, or promotion.
- For the vast majority of Philippine languages, the CFL has not conducted any grammatical studies (e.g. phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, stylistics, and semiotics), nor has it conducted historical or sociolinguistics studies of such languages.
- For the vast majority of Philippine languages, the CFL has not done a systematic collection of corpus.
- For the vast majority of Philippine languages, the CFL has not published any dictionaries, thesauri, or encyclopedia.
- While the Constitution declares that the national language, Filipino, "shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages," and *gives no special status to Tagalog*, the CFL continues to enforce a language *based heavily on Tagalog*, and has redefined the national language through its own internal policies to justify this bias. A simple review of the CFL's website and any of their official communications reveals a language nearly indistinguishable from the Tagalog language. From basic principles of linguistics, the two are objectively the same language because they are mutually intelligible, despite whatever loan words have been inserted or allegedly adopted therein. By contrast, the framers of the Constitution intended Filipino to be completely different from Tagalog, as evidenced by the proceedings of the Constitutional Commission hearings. Commissioner William Villacorta, who drafted the constitution's language provision, gave examples of what the Filipino language should look like: "Sain kayo maglakad dini?", "Mas guapo guid ang bana ko sa bana mo", and other imaginations which are obviously not Tagalog sentences. However, if we were to inspect "Filipino" textbooks in schools, or "Filipino" transcripts from the media, or "Filipino" as used in CFL's communications, their text is understandable to a native Tagalog speaker, and recognizable as his/her own language. The "Filipino" being institutionalized by our government, with the CFL as the lead language agency, certainly does not look like Commissioner Villacorta's mixture. In other words, in its nearly 30 years of existence, the CFL has failed to develop a national language that is truly a representative amalgam of multiple Philippine languages, as envisioned by the Constitutional Commission. Instead, the CFL is pushing a modified, less purist version of the Tagalog language and simply renaming it "Filipino". The CFL is trying to retroactively legitimize this deceit through Senate Bill 499, which cunningly mentions "Tagalog as



the base language of Filipino,” in a section that is supposed to be about the composition of the CFL (Section 5 therein).

- Throughout most administrations, the CFL exerted no effort to include Philippine languages in the education system, except one (Tagalog, or “Filipino”). Mother tongues were finally included by the Department of Education and confirmed by congressional act, but not through any lobbying or support from the CFL. In fact, close associates of the CFL management, members of the NCCA (the CFL’s sister agency), past awardees of CFL, and candidates for CFL commissioner positions filed petitions *against* Republic Act 10533 that institutionalized the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education policy, arguing it to be unconstitutional. Their argument was rejected by the Supreme Court in 2018.
- Congress has also enacted RA 8371 (the IPRA Law) and RA 11106 (the FSL Act) containing landmark provisions on linguistic and educational rights of indigenous peoples and the deaf, yet the CFL has provided little meaningful support for their enforcement. In fact, CFL’s demand that Tagalog-based Filipino be the medium of instruction throughout all levels of education (as stated in SB 499) is in blatant contravention of these laws and the rights they confer.
- The CFL continues to fight for the mandatory inclusion of Filipino language courses in higher education, but has never lobbied for the inclusion of other Philippine languages alongside it. Senate Bill 499 drafted by the CFL administration and filed in 2019 confirms this bias against our mother tongues. It is stated in the explanatory note that the purpose of the bill is to ensure the operationalization of Filipino “as official language and language of instruction in all levels of education,” without mention of including other Philippine languages in the education system. As the Constitution allows Congress to legislate on language matters, there is legally nothing stopping the CFL from lobbying Congress to formulate an act to include other Philippine languages in the education system, at all levels, in addition to Filipino.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the CFL has not adopted this inclusive approach, and judging by the contents of SB 499, shall continue to fight for only one language in the education system.<sup>4</sup>
- While the Commission on Higher Education offered the CFL funding to contextualize general education course syllabi and instructional materials into several Philippine languages, the CFL has contextualized these materials into only one Filipino language.

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<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, the CFL could advocate for a liberal interpretation of “Filipino language”, allowing any Philippine language to be taught in order to partially or fully comply with Filipino language requirements. This would be legally sound because the Constitution does *not* anchor Filipino to Tagalog, and states that it “shall be enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages” (Article XIV, Section 6). The inclusion of various Philippine languages in the education system, at all levels, would facilitate this enrichment.

<sup>4</sup> Imposing one language on colleges and universities is against the Constitution, as it contravenes the academic freedom “enjoyed in all institutions of higher learning” (Article XIV, Sect. 5). Hence, Section 11(n) in SB 499—“Ensure that all educational institutions in all levels of the education system, where applicable, shall maintain the use of Filipino as language of instruction as a requirement of accreditation from Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and Technical Education and Skills Authority”—is unconstitutional. In countries with robust academic freedom, such as the United Kingdom, Finland, Switzerland, Belgium, and Canada, no national agency or policy requires all universities across the country to teach or use a particular language.



- For the vast majority of Philippine languages, the CFL has translated no significant works (e.g. laws, resolutions and other legislative enactments, historical documents, textbooks, canonical literature etc.) into them.
- The CFL has not actively engaged local government units to protect and promote their local languages. The few local governments that have issued ordinances for this purpose, such as Zamboanga City, Angeles City, and La Union, have done so by their own initiative and without the encouragement or help of the CFL. The CFL has hosted a few activities about using Tagalog-based Filipino for communications in government, but not other Philippine languages.<sup>5</sup>
- While the CFL has identified around 50 endangered languages of the Philippines, its response to language endangerment has been grossly inadequate. It has established a nursery for only one endangered language. Meanwhile, its "Bantayog Wika" project claims to honor native languages, but the monuments are not inscribed in the languages they are allegedly trying to promote. If the CFL does not even use our native languages for projects specifically targeting them, then the CFL is not effectively implementing its constitutional mandate to propagate our languages.
- While the CFL leadership has bemoaned the dominance of English, and treated it as a threat to Filipino, they have not publicly recognized the reality that the national lingua franca is replacing many Philippine languages, both big (e.g. Kapampangan, Pangasinan) and small (e.g. Tagbanua, Mangyan Iraya).<sup>6</sup> From 1940-1980, the spread of Tagalog was largely a case of diglossia, in which people still retained their mother tongues in a multilingual equilibrium. From about 1980 onwards, however, with further increases of Tagalog in education and media, many non-Tagalog communities of Luzon, Palawan, Romblon, and Mindoro have been experiencing a one-way shift to Tagalog and the corresponding decline of their mother tongues. Even more alarming is that the CFL administration does not consider this language shift a problem, and have done nothing to address the systemic power imbalance between the national lingua franca and other languages. First, this reveals a lack of awareness of internal linguistic hierarchies in Filipino society, exacerbated by inequitable government policies. Second, the CFL's seeming nonchalance, if not satisfaction, in the ongoing language shift reveals the undervaluing of our country's linguistic heritage and multilingual assets. Third, it reveals a very narrow perspective on Filipino culture and identity, which the CFL has tied to the national language rather than all the unique and beautiful languages of our country.
- Some CFL commissioners are not experts nor recognized champions of the languages that they supposedly represent, and most have no academic training in linguistics. Many have experience in writing, teaching, or promoting Tagalog-based Filipino, but have dubious credentials in other Philippine languages. In fact, some CFL commissioners have gained financially by selling Tagalog or Filipino books, or for winning writing awards in this language. Hence it is in their personal interest to

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<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Court has decided that the Constitution does not rule out the use of regional languages for official purposes, hence the CFL's inaction at promoting regional and local languages in local governance is more a reflection of their laissez-faire attitude towards such languages, rather than any real legal barrier.

<sup>6</sup> Despite its prevalence and global stature, English has statistically had only a minor effect on language shift in the Philippines. While it dominates certain domains, such as broadsheet newspapers, commercial signage, private schools, and some religious institutions, it has not replaced any native Philippine language as an ordinary community language. English is largely restricted to formal domains. A small minority of families use English as the exclusive language of the home (<1%). Changes in home language have mostly been between Philippine languages.



continue to promote one Filipino language and not others. Shockingly, CFL commissioners have also attacked defenders of various mother tongues, which is completely antithetical to their office.

- For decades, the CFL has organized *Buwan ng Wikang Pambansa*, whose name makes it clear that it is intended for only one language. *Buwan ng Wika* activities are usually conducted in the national lingua franca, and other Philippine languages are rarely highlighted or used. When various groups lobbied for the renaming of the celebration into *Buwan ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas*, so that all Filipino vernaculars would be included, the CFL rejected the proposal. This again proves that the CFL is against language equality and linguistic justice.
- For most of its history, the CFL has not fought to ensure the linguistic rights of children, indigenous people, and people with disabilities, enshrined in international agreements to which the Philippines is party, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which call for free use of these people's languages, the provision of education and/or other services in their own languages, and non-discrimination towards them and their languages;
- For most of its history, the CFL, has not disseminated, issued endorsements for, or strove to implement the empowering language articles of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, has not urged the government to become party to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and has not organized nationwide programs for the celebration of International Mother Language Day (February 21).
- The CFL has not pushed for the adoption of Philippine languages (except one) in the technology sector. For example, the CFL has not sent any requests to technology companies for the inclusion of local or regional languages in their products and services. It is embarrassing that languages as small as Corsican (100,000 speakers), Scots Gaelic (50,000), and Hawaiian (2000) are already offered by Google and Facebook, but much larger Philippine languages, such as Ilokano (10 million speakers), Hiligaynon (8 million), Waray (3 million), and Maranao (1 million) are not. The CFL is neglecting one of the most effective ways that our native languages could be developed and propagated.
- Most CFL administrations have not pushed for the inclusion of Philippine languages (except one) in the media sector, such as asking the government for subsidies so that regional and local languages are better represented in film, television, print, and other forms of media.
- The CFL has a tendency of making decisions or issuing orders about language without thorough public consultation. This problem came to the fore when the CFL overstepped its bounds by attempting to change the name of the country from Pilipinas to Filipinas.
- Rather than empower ethnic groups to determine how to write their own languages, which is a basic tenet of responsible, sustainable, and democratic orthography development, the CFL has instead acted like language police, insisting that Philippine languages align to a single orthography, what they call the "Ortograpiyang Pambansa". This move is insensitive to the preferences and conventions of each language community, and has indeed caused protests. Moreover, conformity is unnecessary and impractical. Every language has unique features in terms of



vocabulary, sounds, and grammar. Spelling rules need to consider these features, as well as historical influences, in order to serve its users well. Even if languages may be related, it would not be automatically appropriate to adhere to identical spelling conventions, because the written form would no longer reflect how some of the languages are spoken. While a government agency could provide guidance to a community that is developing spelling rules for their language, it should not dictate the rules (especially when the agency lacks expertise in a particular language).

- By insisting control and pre-approval of orthographies, the CFL has hampered DepEd from including many Philippine mother tongues in the education system. Hence, hundreds of thousands of Filipino children still do not have access to education through their first languages.<sup>7</sup>

It was never the intention of the crafters of the constitution for any Filipino language to replace other native languages, and the Constitution is clear that the national language *and other Philippine languages* should be developed, propagated, and preserved, as stated in Article XIV, Section 9. Secondly, other Philippine languages—not only the national language—*can be used in official capacities*, as upheld by the Supreme Court based on the their analysis of the constitution and constitutional commission proceedings.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it is also explicit in the Constitution that the national language is Filipino, not Tagalog, and that Filipino “shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages” (Article XIV, Section XIV). It does not even state that the language is based on Tagalog, hence the CFL’s advancement of a national language based on Tagalog is merely a historical assumption and not actually supported by the current constitution.

The importance of diversity, equality, and cultural autonomy is upheld in several other clauses in the constitution, such as the State’s commitment to preserve and enrich Filipino national culture based on the principle of “unity in diversity in a climate of free artistic and intellectual expression”, to “conserve, promote, and popularize the nation’s historical and cultural heritage and resources”, to protect the country’s historic wealth, to “recognize, respect, and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions”, and to “ensure equal access to cultural opportunities through the educational system” (see Article XIV, Sections 14-18). These statements value pluralism and enjoin the government to sustain the Philippines’ diversity. They also enjoin the government to give Filipinos equal access to cultural opportunities (which should naturally include opportunities to use their languages, being an integral part of their cultures). An audit of CFL’s spending over the years, however, would reveal that the majority of its budget has been spent on national language projects and activities, with less spent towards all other 120+ languages combined.

Despite the Constitution’s rather flexible, inclusive, and pluralistic provisions vis-a-vis the status and use of Philippine languages, the CFL has done little to elevate most of our languages (except one), and has potentially become a threat to them. The CFL seems to subscribe to the unproven belief that Filipinos are incapable of peace, cooperation and understanding unless they are bound by one language [note: there are living exceptions to this claim, such as the largely peaceful, multilingual Swiss people]. In truth, most Filipinos

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<sup>7</sup> The Constitution declares the CFL to be a research institution, with the function to “undertake, coordinate, and promote researches”; it is not authorized to require any other government agency, local government unit, or person for approval on language matters.

<sup>8</sup> In its ruling of the legality of the K-12 law promulgated on October 9, 2018, the Supreme Court also upheld the legality of using mother tongues in the education system and as official languages in government, quoting Commissioner Bennagen of the Constitutional Commission of 1986, who explained that in addition to Filipino and English, the regional languages “can be accepted also as official languages, even in government and education.” (IV Record of the Constitutional Commission 160-161).



are friendly, adaptable, and tolerant of differences, and learn each other's mother tongues with relative ease.

The CFL has repeatedly betrayed itself as ideologically ambivalent, if not mostly against, the pluralism enshrined in our constitution and exhibited by Filipino society. This is in large part due to Republic Act 7104, which despite its good intentions, introduced the following systemic flaws in the institution it created:

- The name of the commission is singular, not plural, unequivocally emphasizing one Filipino language instead of all Philippine languages.<sup>9</sup> This name is not reflective of the Philippines' linguistic diversity and it institutionalizes bias towards one language. Linguistic favoritism is not ethical for a multilingual, culturally rich, and democratic state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Constitution is also clear that Philippine languages—in the plural, not singular—shall be developed, propagated, and preserved.
- The process for searching and selecting CFL commissioners is not transparent and not democratic. Often new commissioners are simply the recommended nominees of the outgoing CFL management, hence perpetuating whatever ideological bias they have, with very little opportunity for real change.
- The provisions regarding the qualifications of the commissioners are weak, resulting in commissioners who are not recognized experts in the languages they have been chosen to represent, and a dearth of personnel who are trained in linguistics. An academic and professional background in linguistics is essential for conducting language research, which is one of the main functions of the commission.
- There is no provision to ensure equal, equitable, or at least a rational distribution of resources towards the preservation, promotion, and development of the various Philippine languages.
- The centralized structure of the CFL makes it difficult to serve the needs of the regions, all of which have different demographics, languages, and language statuses, attitudes, behaviors, and trends. Hence, many languages are under-researched, under-protected, and under-promoted.
- The majority of CFL staff live in Metro Manila and come from predominantly Tagalog-speaking households. The staff, therefore, are not representative of the linguistic diversity of the Philippines as a whole, and unlikely to act in the best interests of our native languages.
- Only the major languages have dedicated commissioners; most languages do not.
- The Chairman's term is excessively long (7 years), which is longer than the President's. This means that the institution and Philippine languages themselves are

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<sup>9</sup> The monolingual focus evident in the CFL's name is reflective of an outdated ideology originating in France, which claimed a country can only be unified under one language. This ideology has subsequently been abandoned by many countries around the world that now embrace a multilingual identity. The government of France remains resistant to multilingualism and have blocked efforts to include regional languages in their education system and other government services. As a result, most native languages of France are now endangered. France's hardline and exclusive approach has earned it criticism from the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and its own populace, while strong societal divisions persist despite the government's program of language homogenization. The Philippines is even more diverse than France, with a completely different history; it would be foolish to follow France's example.



at the whim of an individual's competence, interest, objectivity, or lack thereof, for an undue period of time.

- There are no checks and balances to prevent the CFL from exercising too much power on language use, which could erode people's linguistic rights and academic freedom. (The provisions in Senate Bill 499 granting even more power to the CFL to dictate language choice are therefore dangerous).<sup>10</sup>
- The CFL is not required to collect data on the health of Philippine languages (e.g. number of speakers, intergenerational transmission rates, frequency of use, domains of use, etc.), nor publish a status report thereof. Hence, the nation is not well informed about the vitality of its own languages, and the CFL has no accountability for our declining linguistic heritage.

Considering the systemic organizational deficiencies, we cannot rely on the CFL administration, current or future, to initiate meaningful change. Under the status quo, the sad reality is that more of our mother tongues are being lost than during the American or Spanish periods. In order to achieve linguistic justice for all Filipinos and ensure the survival of all Philippine languages, the CFL must be transformed by law. For the benefit of future generations, and building upon international human rights agreements to which the Philippines is party, the approval of this measure is earnestly sought.



RUFUS B. RODRIGUEZ

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<sup>10</sup> Section 4 of Senate Bill 499 states that the CFL (or KWF) shall be "The *primary policy-making* and coordinating body on language concerns" [emphasis added]. This is a case of overreach. Nowhere does the 1987 Constitution authorize the CFL to be the primary policy-making body on language concerns. Language policy is the prerogative of Congress through its law-making function. The function of the CFL, according to the constitution, is to "undertake, coordinate, and promote researches". Therefore, it is primarily a research institution.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Introduced by Representative Rufus B. Rodriguez*

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House Bill No. 6280

AN ACT

TO REFORM THE *KOMISYON SA WIKANG FILIPINO* (COMMISSION ON THE FILIPINO LANGUAGE) INTO THE *KOMISYON NG MGA WIKA SA PILIPINAS* (COMMISSION ON PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES), REVISING ITS STRUCTURE, POWERS, DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

**Section 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “*Commission on Philippine Languages Act*”

**Section 2. Declaration of Policy.** –In accordance with the Constitution enabling Congress to pass legislation to formulate and amend language policy, and the constitutional principle of “unity in diversity”, it is hereby declared to be a policy of the Government to protect, promote, and help develop all Philippine languages, including national, regional, and local languages, whether spoken or signed, and allocate resources equitably for the promotion and development of such languages. Furthermore, the Government shall respect, protect, and promote multilingualism and language diversity as a fundamental part of Filipino society, culture, and heritage, and shall uphold linguistic rights and freedoms of all citizens and ethnolinguistic communities.

**Section 3. Definition of Terms.** – As used in this Act, the following terms and defined as follows:

- (a) Commission – refers to the Commission on Philippine Languages.
- (b) Chairperson – refers to the Chairperson of the Commission.
- (c) Filipino – refers to the national language of the Philippines.
- (d) Philippine languages – refers to the 120-180 indigenous languages of the Philippines; can also be called “native languages”.
- (e) Regional languages – refers to the *lingua francae* or the commonly spoken languages of a region; “Languages indigenous to a region” refers to languages that originated from that region, or have been traditionally spoken in the region for hundreds of years.
- (f) Local languages – refers to languages commonly spoken at the barangay, municipal, or provincial level
- (g) Auxiliary official language – refers to a particular language, spoken in certain areas, which supports or helps communication, learning, and other societal functions in such areas, and can be used in official capacities alongside other official languages.
- (h) Ethnolinguistic communities – refers to certain groups of people who identify with a particular language or ethnicity. Also can be called language communities.
- (i) Medium of official communication – refers to a language used by Government for its official transactions.



(j) Medium of instruction – refers to a language used by an educational institution for teaching.

(k) Endangered or threatened language – refers to a language that is declining in use or population; there are different levels of endangerment according to specific criteria.

**Section 4. *Reforming the Commission.*** – The Commission on the Filipino Language (Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino) is hereby renamed and restructured as the *Komisyon ng Mga Wika sa Pilipinas* (Commission on Philippine Languages), composed of representatives of various ethnolinguistic groups, regions, and disciplines, which shall formulate, coordinate and promote policies and activities for the development, propagation and preservation of Philippine languages, including national, regional, and local languages. It shall be directly under the Office of the President.

**Section 5. *Organizational Structure.*** – The reformed Commission shall have a decentralized structure. It shall have regional semi-autonomous sub-commissions or centers composed of representatives and staff from the various languages and cultures of their respective regions, which will carry out most of the commission's study, research, development, and publication functions with wide latitude. The regional sub-commissions or centers will protect, promote, research, and develop the indigenous languages of their respective regions, alongside the national language, and their activities will be contextualized to the needs and dynamics of the regions they serve. For activities or projects of national scope, complementarity and synergy shall be achieved through coordination of the Board of Commissioners. Each regional sub-commission or center, in its management, staffing, programs must adequately represent the languages of the region it serves. The name, website, and important communications of each regional sub-commission must be translated into at least two Philippine languages. The majority of the Commission's personnel shall be based in the regional sub-commissions, with at least one personnel with a degree in linguistics in each region, and focal persons assigned to the native languages found therein.

The Commission shall respect the rights of Autonomous Regions to determine their language policy as provided by law. They may, however, voluntarily join the Commission and be granted seats on the Board of Commissioners.

**Section 6. *Budget Structure.*** – Budget for the regional sub-commissions shall be based on objective criteria, taking into consideration population size, number of indigenous languages, number of endangered languages, linguistic diversity index, and other relevant factors. Being semi-autonomous, they shall have control over at least 50% of their budget.

**Section 7. *Board of Commissioners.*** – Each regional sub-commission shall be headed by a Commissioner who is a member of the *Board of Commissioners* (or national board). The Chairperson shall rotate between the sub-commission heads annually. One representative each from the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education; and the Department of Interior and Local Government, of no less than undersecretary level, shall be ex officio members, as shall the respective chairpersons of the Senate Committee Chair on Education, Arts, and Culture, and the House of Representatives Committee on Basic Education and Culture.

**Section 8. *Appointment and Qualifications of Commissioners.*** – Each regional sub-commission shall initiate a public and transparent process to collect nominations for people to serve as Commissioner for their region, and shall ensure input from the ethnolinguistic communities therein. Individuals, language and literature groups, local government units, educational institutions, religious institutions, media companies, and others in a particular region may submit nominations for the Commissioner representing their region. All nominees



shall be made publically known and duly forwarded to the President. The President shall select the candidate who he/she believes is most qualified to serve as the region's commissioner on languages.

No one shall be appointed as commissioner unless he/she is a natural-born Filipino citizen, at least thirty (30) years old, morally upright, noted for his/her expertise in linguistics and languages, and lived at least one (1) year in the region he/she shall serve. A Commissioner must have a demonstrable record of researching or promoting a language or languages indigenous to the region he/she shall represent; must have published a research study about, or written literature in, a language indigenous to the region he/she shall represent; must understand, speak, read, and write fluently at least one language indigenous to the region he/she shall represent; and must be committed to upholding linguistic diversity and linguistic rights.

**Section 9. Term of Office.** – The Commissioners, representing each region respectively, shall serve for a term of four (4) years. The commissioners may be reappointed for a maximum of one (1) term only. A Commissioner who has served two terms, regardless of region, shall no longer be qualified to serve as a Commissioner again.

The Chairperson of the Board shall rotate between the regional Commissioners annually. In the absence of the Chairperson, the commissioners shall choose a temporary or acting chairperson.

Commissioners shall serve and continue to hold office until their successors have been appointed. Should a Commissioner fail to complete his/her term, his/her successor shall be recommended by the Commission and appointed by the President for the unexpired portion of the term.

**Section 10. Compensation.** – The Chairperson and Commissioners shall have the same rank, privileges, salary, allowances and other emoluments as the Chairperson and Commissioners, respectively, of other constitutional commissions.

**Section 11. Rules of Procedures and Meetings.** – The Commission shall adopt its own rules and procedures and shall hold sessions en-banc at least once every quarter or as often as it deems necessary. A majority of the commissioners shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The boards of the regional sub-commissions shall determine their own rules and procedures of meetings.

**Section 12. Executive Director.** – There shall be an executive director who shall be appointed by the Commission for a term of five (5) years and who may be reappointed for a maximum of one (1) term. The executive director shall sit as a non-voting member of the board. The Commission shall determine the powers, functions, duties and compensation of the executive director.

**Section 13. The Secretariat.** – There shall be a secretariat to be headed by the executive director. The functions, duties and compensation of its personnel shall be determined by the Commission, upon the recommendation of the executive director.

**Section 14. Powers, Functions and Duties of the Commission.** – The Commission, pursuant to the pertinent provisions of the Constitution, shall have the following powers, functions and duties:

- (a) Recommend policies and formulate plans, programs, and activities to ensure the preservation, promotion, propagation and development of all Philippine languages, including national, regional, and local languages, both spoken and signed;



- (b) Establish mechanisms for the continuing enrichment of the national language with vocabulary from Philippine and other relevant languages, by advocating for increased representation and inclusion of such languages in Filipino language courses, dictionaries, media, technology, and other sectors, by recognizing, researching, and taking inspiration from syncretic Filipino speech varieties that have organically developed (e.g. Davao, Zamboanga, Masbate), and promoting such variety.<sup>11</sup>
- (c) Undertake or contract research on Philippine languages, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, stylistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics studies, and historical linguistics studies.
- (d) Promote balance and equilibrium among Philippine languages, safeguard language diversity, and disseminate the benefits of multilingualism; likewise, defend the importance of Philippine languages, and inspire interest, joy and mastery in them.
- (e) Collect or ensure the collection of data on the number, distribution, and use of Philippine languages, monitor trends in such data, and formulate appropriate policies, plans, programs, and recommendations to address language endangerment, mitigate language shift, and prevent language loss.
- (f) Conduct language documentation activities, such as compiling words, phrases, idioms, quotations, proverbs, jokes, songs and other creations in various Philippine languages, through documentary analysis, interviews, recordings, etc.
- (g) Create dictionaries, thesauruses, and primers in Philippine languages, both monolingual and multilingual;
- (h) Conduct information campaigns, workshops, trainings, and other capacity building activities to increase knowledge about, proficiency in, and appreciation for Philippine languages
- (i) Organize or facilitate celebrations and competitions for the promotion of Philippine languages (including the observance of International Mother Language Day and other indigenous language activities promoted by the United Nations), and advocate for the inclusion of Philippine languages in existing celebrations and competitions (e.g. National Schools Press Conference, Festival of Talents, Literature Month, Buwan ng Wika, etc.).
- (j) Propose guidelines and standards for linguistic forms and expressions in official communications, publications, textbooks and other reading and teaching materials, without prejudice to the right of ethnolinguistic communities to determine how to use and write their languages.
- (k) Encourage and promote, through various incentives, the creation of original literature, music, film, reference materials, and other works in Philippine languages, across various disciplines;
- (l) Undertake and support translations of important literature, film, laws, historical documents, reference materials, educational materials and other works of various disciplines, into Philippine languages;
- (m) Engage businesses to promote the inclusion of Philippine languages in their products and services, especially media, telecommunications, and technology companies

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<sup>11</sup> For a concrete example, the Commission would work with companies like Google to include vocabulary from other Philippine languages in their Filipino language services. Currently, the Google Translate tool for Filipino only recognizes and translates Tagalog sentences. If Filipino language is to be inclusive, flexible, and further enriched, then Google will need to expand its database of Filipino vocabulary such that it could successfully translate a sentence even if it contains words from Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, and other languages. Likewise, an enriched Filipino language map should show not only the Tagalog names of features but also the regional language names, depending on the area of the map, or give users the option to toggle between the two. Filipino will not be significantly enriched from other Philippine languages unless such mechanisms for inclusion and lexical cross-pollination are put in practice.



- (n) Conduct at the national, regional and local levels, public hearings, conferences, seminars and other group discussions to identify and help resolve problems and issues involving the development, propagation and preservation of Philippine languages;
- (o) Consult and involve the public on the formulation of major plans, policies, and programs pertaining to language, ensuring adequate participation and representation of different ethnolinguistic communities, including writers, educators, broadcasters, researchers, and advocates of various Philippine languages.
- (p) Spearhead and advise on policies with implications to languages and ethnolinguistic communities, ensuring respect for multilingualism and linguistic diversity; advocating for and safeguarding the inclusion of Philippine languages in education, governance, and other sectors, alongside existing national and official languages; and defending linguistic rights such as the right to use and learn one's mother tongue, and the right to use and learn other languages.
- (q) Ensure equitable allocation of resources towards the preservation, promotion, propagation and development of Philippine languages;
- (r) Partner with relevant community groups in raising awareness and preservation of foreign languages of historical, religious or cultural significance to the Philippines (e.g. Hokkien, Spanish, Arabic).
- (s) Guide the government bureaucracy to embrace multilingualism, adopt multilingual policies, provide support for multilingual services, and join and implement international agreements to help secure and strengthen linguistic rights for all Filipino citizens.
- (t) Form international linkages to exchange knowledge, research, and best practices on language planning for diverse settings, language revitalization, multilingual education, and inclusive, sustainable development, with the aim of becoming a judicious model for other multilingual countries.
- (u) Call on any department, bureau, office, agency or any instrumentality of Government or on any private entity, institution or organization for cooperation and assistance in the performance of its functions, duties and responsibilities;
- (v) Monitor and provide oversight in the implementation of this Act, and ensure that no basic rights or freedoms are infringed in so doing;
- (w) Promulgate rules, regulations and guidelines to implement its policies, plans and programs;
- (x) Appoint, subject to the provisions of existing laws, its officials and employees and such other personnel as are necessary for the effective performance of its functions, duties and responsibilities; and dismiss them for cause;
- (y) Organize and reorganize the structure of the Commission, create or abolish positions, or change the designation of existing positions to meet the changing conditions or as the need therefore arises; provided that the majority of personnel are based in the regional sub-commissions;
- (z) Perform such other activities which are necessary for the effective exercise of the abovementioned powers, functions, duties and responsibilities.

**Section 15. Accountability.** – The Commission shall formulate and adopt guidelines, standards and systems for monitoring and reporting on its performance, and submit to the Office of the President and to Congress an annual progress report on the implementation of its policies, plans and programs in each region. It shall identify which Philippine languages it has supported, and provide approximate figures on how much money was allocated and spent for each. It shall also identify what steps have been taken to increase the representation of various Philippine and other relevant languages in Filipino language policies, programs, products, and services to foster enrichment.

The Commission must strive to respect and uphold the linguistic rights of individuals and language communities in exercising its powers, duties, and functions. Contempt for



indigenous languages and linguistic diversity, violation of linguistic rights, and discrimination demonstrated by any personnel of the Commission is grounds for their removal.

The Commission shall create a multilingual mechanism, online and offline, for the public to submit complaints and concerns about the Commission or language issues in general. The complaints and concerns shall be visible to the public, although individuals shall be given the option to remain anonymous. The public's complaints and concerns, and steps the Commission took to address them, shall be included in the Commission's annual report.

At least once every four (4) years, and in cooperation with other bodies if necessary, the Commission must publish a comprehensive report on the status of Philippine languages, including estimated population sizes, geographic distribution, language practices and trends, level of endangerment according to various criteria (particularly intergenerational transmission rates), language attitudes, literacy rates in Philippine languages, and the population's general knowledge about Philippine languages.

**Section 16. *Reorganization Process.*** – Reorganization shall be conducted in a gradual manner that will ensure the least disruption of ongoing programs of the CFL. The qualified and necessary personnel of the CFL shall be retained.

**Section 17. *Appropriations.*** – The funding necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act is hereby authorized to be appropriated in the General Appropriations Act of the year following its enactment into law.

**Section 18. *Promulgation.*** – This Act shall be promulgated in Filipino and in English and shall be translated into the major languages of the Philippines.

**Section 19. *Separability Clause.*** – In the event any provision of this Act or the application of such provision is declared invalid, the remainder of this Act or the application of the said provision shall be affected thereby.

**Section 20. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders or parts thereof that are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

**Section 21. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect after fifteen (15) days following its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in one (1) newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,