



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

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1939



Introduced by Honorable MARK A. VILLAR

AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR THE PROTECTION OF WHISTLEBLOWERS, ENSURING THEIR
SECURITY AND PROVIDING BENEFITS FOR THEIR WELFARE

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution provides that "*The prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people, The Government may call upon the people to defend the State and, in the fulfilment thereof, all citizens may be required, under conditions provided by law, to render personal military, or civil service*". (Article II, Section 4)

The 1987 Constitution enunciates, "No person shall be compelled to be a witness against himself." (Article II, Section 17)

The 1987 Constitution states, "Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must, at all times, be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and efficiency; act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives." (Article XI, Section 1)

The strength of a government is the trust of its people. An integral part of the social contract between those who govern and those who are governed lies on the fact that the mantle of protection of the law and the obligations it contain falls upon all.

For several years now, our government has instituted a program to ensure the safety and well being of persons who have clung to the idea that public service is a public trust and that the government and its officials must not only be credible, but also accountable.

Persons whom we call as "whistleblowers" are the vinculum of maintaining this accountability; they expose what is wrong and testify to their commission. More than

these, they are the ones who embody the moral code of that bond between government and people.

It is unfortunate however that despite the formal institution of a witness protection program, these brave individuals can still expect retaliation, be it in the form of threat of bodily harm or death. Others are faced with other kinds of retaliatory acts such as discriminatory conduct or measures from their employers. Some lose employment benefits. Some lose their jobs. Such is the fear of retribution that those who are brave are discouraged and those who will speak are muted.

This bill is intended to ensure that the best protection that the State can afford to our vanguards of accountability is given. And, through mechanisms, the chilling and discouraging effect of the fear of retaliation is removed.

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



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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 "*Whistleblower Protection Act of 2016.*"

SEC. 2. **Declaration of Policy.** - Public office is a public trust. It is the policy of the State to promote and ensure full accountability in the conduct of its officers and employees, and exact full retribution from those who shall engage in improper conduct. Toward this end, the State shall:

- (A.) Maintain honesty and promote high standards of integrity in the public service;
- (B.) Safeguard the national interest through the prosecution of corrupt and erring public officials and employees; and
- (C.) Encourage and facilitate the disclosure of corrupt conduct and practices in the public service by providing benefits prescribed under existing laws.

SEC. 3. **Definitions.** - As used in this Act:

- (A.) "Employer" shall mean any individual, partnership, association, corporation or entity, including the government, or any person or group of persons who shall directly or indirectly for or on behalf of said individual, partnership, association, corporation or entity, employ an employee as defined in this Act.
- (B.) "Employee" shall mean any person who is made to work by, or who renders service for, an employer. The term shall include public officers and employees as defined in this Act as well as any person considered an "employee" under the Labor Code.

- (C.) "Public officer/employee" shall refer to any person holding any office or performing any function or duty in the Government of the Republic of the Philippines by virtue of an appointment, election or contract.
- (D.) "Government" shall include the National Government, and any of its subdivisions, agencies or instrumentalities, including government-owned and controlled corporations and their subsidiaries, and Local Government Units.
- (E.) "Retaliatory action" shall refer to any negative or obstructive response, reaction or reprisal to a disclosure made under this Act aimed at, pertaining to, or against a whistleblower or any of the members of his/her family and relatives up to the fourth civil degree of consanguinity or affinity. Said actions shall include criminal, civil or administrative proceedings commenced or pursued against said whistleblower or any of the members of his/her family or relatives up to the fourth civil degree of consanguinity or affinity as well as any retaliatory action in the workplace.
- (F.) "Retaliatory action in the workplace" shall mean any discriminatory conduct or policies which affect promotion or job assignment including undue negative performance appraisal, close monitoring by supervisors, unwarranted criticisms or avoidance by co-employees, blacklisting from other job opportunities or prejudicial transfers by reason of a disclosure made under this Act.
- (G.) "Acts constituting improper conduct" shall mean any act or omission of a public officer or employee solely, or in cooperation, conspiracy with, or with the assistance of, private persons which is covered by or constitute a violation of:
 - (1.) Presidential Decree No. 46 otherwise known as "Making it punishable for Public Officials and Employees to receive, and for Private persons to give, gifts on any occasion, including Christmas";
 - (2.) Republic Act No. 3019 otherwise known as "Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act;"
 - (3.) Republic Act No. 6713 otherwise known as "An Act Establishing a Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees;"
 - (4.) Republic Act No. 7080 otherwise known as the "Anti-Plunder Law";
 - (5.) Title VII of Book Two of the Revised Penal Code on Crimes Committed by Public Officers; and
 - (6.) All other laws that penalize or sanction any act or omission of a public officer or employee.
- (H.) "Whistleblower" shall refer to any person who has personal knowledge or access to any data, information, fact or event constituting improper conduct; Provided, that such person must not have any direct participation in such improper conduct, or in cases where such person participated in any improper conduct, such person is not the most guilty and shall therefore qualify as a state witness against the persons subject of such disclosure.
- (I.) "Qualified Whistleblower" shall mean a whistleblower qualified and admitted into the Whistleblower's Program of the Implementing Agency in accordance with this Act and its implementing rules and regulations.
- (J.) "Implementing Agencies or Agency" shall collectively or individually refer to the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and the Public Attorney's Office (PAO).
- (K.) "Whistleblower Council" shall refer to the council defined under Section 31 of this Act.

SEC. 4. **Coverage.** - Notwithstanding the provisions of law on prescription of crimes,

this Act shall cover all acts constituting improper conduct irrespective of the time of commission thereof.

SEC. 5. Admission Qualification for the Program. -Whistleblowers, whether from the public or private sector, shall be entitled to the benefits provided under this Act; Provided, that all the following requisites concur:

- (A.) The disclosure is voluntary, in writing and under oath;
- (B.) The disclosure relates to acts constituting improper conduct; and
- (C.) The information to be disclosed is admissible in evidence.

SEC. 6. Necessity of Testimony. - The testimony of a qualified whistle blower in court shall not be necessary for the entitlement or enjoyment of the benefits of this Act. In the event that the said whistleblower's testimony is required as found by the Implementing Agency to be necessary and indispensable for a successful prosecution of a case, he/she shall be entitled to the additional benefits and protection provided under R.A. No. 6891 otherwise known as the Witness Protection Program, funding for which shall be sourced from the budget as provided under Section 32 hereof.

SEC. 7. Credibility of a Whistleblower. - In all cases, the fact of the entitlement of the qualified whistleblower to the protection and benefits provided in this Act shall not be admissible in evidence to diminish or affect his credibility.

SEC. 8. Perpetuation of Testimony. - Once admitted into the program, a whistleblower may perpetuate his/her testimony pursuant to Rule 134 of the Revised Rules of Court.

SEC. 9. Memorandum of Agreement with the Person to be Protected. - Before a person is provided protection and benefits as a whistleblower for the State, he/she shall first execute a Memorandum of Agreement with the Implementing Agency which shall set forth his/her responsibilities as follows:

- (A.) To provide information to and testify before all branches or agencies of government in an appropriate proceeding on facts constituting improper conduct;
- (B.) To avoid commission of crime;
- (C.) To take all necessary precautions to preclude detection by others of the facts concerning the protection provided him/her under this Act;
- (D.) To cooperate with all reasonable requests of officers and employees of the government who are providing him/her protection under this Act; and
- (E.) To regularly inform the Implementing Agency's program official concerned of his/her current activities and address.

SEC. 10. Breach of the Memorandum of Agreement. -Substantial breach of the Memorandum of Agreement, provided in Section 9 hereof shall be sufficient ground for the termination of the protection and benefits provided under this Act; Provided, however, that before terminating the protection and benefits extended to him/her, the Implementing Agency shall send notice to the qualified whistle blower concerned, stating therein the reason for such termination and shall give him/her sufficient opportunity to explain and respond to such notice.

SEC. 11. Confidentiality. - Except insofar as allowed by this Act, during and after the

disclosure, and throughout and after any proceedings undertaken thereafter, a whistleblower is entitled to absolute confidentiality as to:

- (A.) His/her identity;
- (B.) The subject matter of his/her disclosure; and
- (C.) The person to whom such disclosure has been made.

There shall be no such confidentiality regarding his/her identity if a whistle blower makes a public disclosure of acts constituting improper conduct unless, notwithstanding such public disclosure, he/she has taken means obviously intended to preserve his/her anonymity.

SEC. 12. Confidentiality of Information. - No person to whom a disclosure has been made or referred to shall divulge any information that may identify or tend to identify a whistleblower or reveal the subject matter of such disclosure, except only as to the following circumstances:

- (A.) The whistleblower consents in writing prior to such a disclosure of;
- (B.) The disclosure is indispensable and essential as determined by the Implementing Agency, taking into consideration the necessary proceedings to be had after said disclosure; or
- (C.) The disclosure or referral is made pursuant to an obligation under this Act. The prohibition on disclosure under this Section shall apply to any person who has become privy to any confidential information, whether officially or otherwise.

SEC. 13. Violation of Confidentiality. - Any person who shall violate the protection of confidentiality of a protected disclosure under Sections 11 and 12 of this Act, shall suffer the penalty of imprisonment of not less than six (6) months but not more than one (1) year with the accessory penalty of temporary absolute disqualification for public office, in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to the whistleblower in such amount of damages as may be awarded and deemed reasonable by the court.

The proceedings herein shall be independent of any action that an aggrieved whistleblower may take before the Civil Service Commission or the Department of Labor and Employment for unfair or discriminatory practices, back wages, or other labor dispute, or before other quasi-judicial agencies that may or may not have arisen from a disclosure, or a believed or suspected disclosure.

SEC 14. No Breach of Duty of Confidentiality. - A whistleblower who has made a disclosure under this Act upon whom a provision of law, regulation, issuance, practice or other convention, imposes upon him/her the duty to maintain confidentiality with respect to any information disclosed to him/her shall be considered not to have committed a breach thereof.

SEC 15. Defense of Privileged Communication. - A whistleblower who has made a disclosure under this Act shall have in any other inquiry or proceeding the defense of absolute privileged communication with respect to the subject matter of his/her disclosure or information given to the proper authorities.

SEC 16. False and Misleading Disclosures. - Any person found guilty of deliberately

and voluntarily giving false or misleading information in connection with acts or omissions constituting improper conduct shall suffer imprisonment for a period one (1) year and one (1) day up to two (2) years at the discretion of the court as well as perpetual absolute disqualification from holding public office, in case of a public officer or employee, without prejudice to other liabilities under existing laws.

SEC 17. Protection against Disciplinary Action or Reprisals and Prohibited Acts.

- A whistleblower who has made or is believed or suspected to have made a disclosure under this Act shall not be liable to disciplinary action for making said disclosure.

Prohibited acts under this section include retaliatory action in a workplace or prejudicial conduct towards a whistle blower, such as: discriminatory actions, reprimand, punitive transfers, unwarranted referral to a psychiatrist or counselor, and undue or inappropriate poor or failing performance reviews. Other prejudicial conducts include obstruction of an investigation, withdrawal of essential resources, alteration of policies and procedures, undue reports and the attachment of unfair personnel file notes.

Any employer who has undertaken reprisals and/or initiated disciplinary actions and/or imposed sanctions or other forms of retaliatory actions, including but not limited to workplace ostracism, questions and attacks on motives, accusations of disloyalty and dysfunction, public humiliation, and the denial of work or promotion, or who encourages, causes or commits, directly or indirectly, retaliatory action or reprisals against a whistleblower, or anyone believed or suspected to be one, shall be liable for the offense defined under this Act.

Any officer or employee who refuses to follow orders of superior that would cause them to violate any provision of this Act shall likewise be protected from reprisals and retaliatory action in the workplace.

For purposes of this protection, an applicant for employment shall be deemed an employee and entitled to such protection.

Provided, however, that an employer of a whistleblower shall be notified through a certification issued by the Implementing Agency within a period of thirty (30) days, from the date when the whistleblower last reported for work. Provided, further, that an employer shall have the option to remove said whistleblower from employment after securing a clearance from the Civil Service Commission and the Department of Labor and Employment, as may be appropriate, in case of a prolonged absence due to transfer or permanent relocation under this Act or R.A. No. 6891.

SEC 18. Protection against other Actions. - A whistleblower who has made a disclosure under this Act shall not be subject to any liability whether administrative, civil, criminal for making such a disclosure. No action, claim or demand may be taken against a whistleblower for making such disclosure, nor shall any evidence presented be used against him/her in court.

This protection shall also operate as immunity in favor of a whistleblower against any action or proceeding taken against him/her by reason of his/her disclosure. Provided, however, that the whistle blower does not appear to be the most guilty in the commission of the act or acts constituting improper conduct.

SEC. 19. Discriminatory Hiring. - Any individual, firm, corporation, office or employer

who shall deny a qualified applicant of employment, or who shall reject his/her application for employment solely on the ground that the applicant is or will be a whistleblower, shall be guilty of an offense punishable by not more than six (6) months imprisonment with the accessory penalty of suspension of the right to hold public office, in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to indemnify the whistleblower for damages as may be awarded by the court.

SEC. 20. Retaliatory Action in the Workplace. - Any person who shall commit any retaliatory act in a workplace as defined under this Act, against an employee who is a whistleblower, or believed or suspected to be one, shall be guilty of an offense and shall suffer the penalty of not more than six (6) months imprisonment with the accessory penalty of suspension of the right to hold public office, in case of a public officer or employee, and shall be civilly liable to indemnify a whistleblower in case damages are incurred and as may be awarded by the court.

The aggrieved whistleblower shall be entitled to the provisional remedy of injunction against any retaliatory action in the workplace, prejudicial conduct or discriminatory treatment by reason of the said whistle blower's intended or actual disclosure.

The proceedings herein shall be independent of any action that an aggrieved person may take before the Civil Service Commission or the Department of Labor and Employment for unfair discriminatory practices, back wages, or other labor dispute, or before other quasi-judicial agencies that mayor may not have arisen from a disclosure, or a believed or suspected disclosure.

SEC 21. Penalty for Retaliatory Acts against a Whistleblower. - Any person who commits any of the retaliatory acts as defined in this Act against a whistleblower and/or who hinders, delays, prevents or dissuades a whistleblower from:

- (A.) Attending, assisting or testifying, before any investigating agency and/or judicial or quasi-judicial body;
- (B.) Reporting to a law enforcement agency, public official and/or the judiciary the commission or possible commission of an offense or a violation of conditions of probation, parole, or release pending judicial proceedings;
- (C.) Seeking the arrest of another person in connection with the offense;
- (D.) Causing a criminal prosecution, or a proceeding for the revocation of a parole or probation; or
- (E.) Performing and enjoying the rights and benefits under this Act, or who attempts to do so shall be fined not more than One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 100,000.00) and/or suffer imprisonment of or not less than six (6) months but not more than six (6) years or both at the discretion of a court and shall also suffer the penalty of perpetual disqualification from holding public office in case of a public officer or employee.

SEC. 22. Benefits and Security and Protection of a Qualified Whistleblower. - A qualified whistleblower shall be entitled to an allowance sufficient for his/her daily basic financial requirements considering his personal circumstances, provided he/she requests for said allowance and the Implementing Agency determines and approves the reasonableness of such request, in accordance with the implementing rules and regulations of this Act.

A qualified whistle blower shall likewise be entitled to housing and personal security

regardless of whether the disclosure is made in confidence or in public. Accordingly, the implementing Agency is hereby authorized to allocate funds and resources as provided for in Section 32 hereof for the full satisfaction of the benefits and security and protection of a qualified Whistle blower, in accordance with the implementing rules and regulations of this Act.

This section is without prejudice to any benefits a qualified whistleblower may be entitled to under R.A. No. 6891 provided that the necessary amount shall be sourced from the budget as provided for in Section 32 hereof and that no duplication of benefit shall ensue.

SEC. 23. Financial Rewards for Whistleblower. - A qualified whistleblower shall be entitled to a monetary reward on a contingency basis, equivalent to at least ten percent (10%) of the amount which may be recovered as a result of his disclosure or the amount of One Million Pesos (Php 1,000,000.00), whichever is lower.

SEC. 24. Abstract. - All government agencies, offices, bureaus and local government units, including government owned or controlled corporations, whether or not with original charters, shall conspicuously display an abstract of this Act and the rights and protections of whistleblowers, including the obligations of employers under this Act. Such abstract shall be provided in the implementing rules and regulations.

All government agencies, offices, bureaus and local government units, including government owned and controlled corporations, whether or not with original charters, shall likewise put in place internal procedures for dealing with whistleblowers consistent with the provisions of this Act and its implementing rules and regulations. Said internal procedure shall be widely disseminated to all employees.

All other employers, specifically those in the private sector, shall also conspicuously display notices of their employees' protections and their obligations under this Act and its implementing rules and regulations.

SEC. 25. Failure of an Employer to Post Abstract. - The failure to post an Abstract or to adopt internal procedures as required under Section 24 of this Act shall constitute an offense and shall be penalized with a fine in the amount of One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php100,000.00) for the first offense. Said amount shall be doubled for every succeeding offense/s.

SEC. 26. Failure to Act or Report to the Implementing Agency. - Any person under obligation to report a disclosure under this Act to the Implementing Agency but who fails to do so within the period of two (2) months, or who fails to act thereon or cause an investigation thereof, shall be guilty of an offense and shall suffer the penalty of not more than six (6) months imprisonment, and/or a fine amounting to not more than Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php300,000.00) without prejudice to any other liability that may be imposed upon such person under existing laws.

SEC. 27. Confidentiality of the Proceedings. - All proceedings involving application and/or enjoyment of the benefits under this Act, including any action taken thereon, shall be confidential in nature. No information or documents given or submitted in support thereof shall be released except upon written order of the Implementing Agency, and provided such disclosure shall not endanger the life of a qualified whistle blower.

SEC. 28. Powers and Functions of the Implementing Agencies or Agency. - In

addition to their respective powers and functions under existing laws, the Implementing Agencies shall:

- (A.) Supervise, monitor and coordinate all efforts relative to the implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Act;
- (B.) Investigate all disclosures made under this Act, prosecute or recommend prosecution of the same when warranted;
- (C.) Evaluate the qualification of whistleblowers for coverage under this Act, and whenever appropriate, make the appropriate decision on their entitlement to the benefits and security and protection extended herein;
- (D.) Undertake, in coordination and cooperation with the private and public sectors, an information campaign to educate the public on the provisions and benefits of this Act;
- (E.) Develop plans and implement programs to further encourage whistleblowers with a view for effective deterrence and/or prosecution of improper conduct as well as acts amounting to graft and corrupt practices;
- (F.) Control and administer, through coordination and consistent with the provisions and purpose of this Act, the protection and benefits of whistleblowers and the funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act;
- (G.) Call upon, or deputize any department, bureau, office or any other government agency or public official to assist in the effective implementation and enforcement of this Act; and
- (H.) Grant immunity in accordance with the provisions of this Act and its implementing rules and regulation.

SEC. 29. Implementing Agency, Option of Whistleblower. - A whistleblower shall have the right to indicate his preference as to the Implementing Agency he/she intends to be admitted and/or qualified in as a whistleblower. The Implementing Agency so chosen shall have the primary jurisdiction and authority to exercise the powers and functions provided for under Section 28 of this Act.

SEC. 30. Congressional Whistleblower Program. - The Senate and the House of Representatives may have their own Whistleblower's Program for resource persons and/or whistleblowers appearing before them or their respective committees.

The resource person and/or whistleblower, with his/her express consent, may be admitted into the program upon the recommendation of the legislative committee where his/her testimony is needed when in its judgment there is pressing necessity therefor: Provided, that such recommendation is approved by the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House, whichever the case may be.

The Senate or the House of Representative, as the case may be, shall have primary jurisdiction in the administration and implementation of the program independent from any other agency of government when the investigation or the safety of the resource person or whistleblower shall be prejudiced.

SEC. 31. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - There is hereby created a Whistleblower Council which shall be composed of the Implementing Agencies and headed by the Office of the Solicitor General.

The Council shall be primarily and solely responsible for the drafting and promulgation of the necessary Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for the effective implementation

of this Act. The Council's submission to Congress of the approved IRR and the causing of its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation shall render the council functus officio.

SEC. 32. **Appropriations.** - The amount of One Hundred Million Pesos (Php100,000,000.00) is hereby authorized to be appropriated out of any funds in the National Treasury not otherwise allocated to carry into effect the purpose of this Act.

Other funding schemes or sources that may be authorized under existing laws shall be allowed in furtherance hereof.

SEC. 33. **Separability Clause.** - If any provision or part hereof, is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provisions not otherwise affected thereby shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 34. **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. 35. **Effectivity Clause.** - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,