

Republic of the Philippines  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
Quezon City, Philippines

**EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS**  
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 616



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**Introduced by Congressman ALFRED VARGAS**

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**EXPLANATORY NOTE**

The World Health Organization has observed that the major causes of death in low income countries can be treated effectively with simple essential medicines. However, the medicines are often not available, not accessible or not affordable.

A 2011 study identified insufficient access to low cost, safe, and quality essential medicines as one of the issues confronting the Philippine health system.<sup>1</sup> It observed that there essential medicines are only available 33% of the time. It also found that medicines covered by PhilHealth are often not available in authorized outlets. Thus, many low-income patients are either not treated or face high out-of-pocket expenses for medicines.

This bill seeks to improve the Filipinos' access to medicines by establishing a free medicine assistance program for the poor.

Through this, we are giving the less-fortunate better chances of survival from curable ailments, and thereby improving the overall health outcomes in the country.

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

  
**ALFRED VARGAS**

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<sup>1</sup> Faraon, Anthony R.G. (undated). *"Improving Access to Medicines Project in the Philippines – the Palawan Pilot: A Public-Private Partnership in Addressing Accessibility, Availability and Affordability."*

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**AN ACT**  
**ESTABLISHING A FREE MEDICINE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR THE POOR AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR**

*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 “*Free Medicine for the Poor Act.*”

**SEC 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health and well-being of every Filipino and to adopt a system of implementing the delivery of free basic medicines to those who have less in life in all health facilities in the country, giving priority to the underprivileged, ailing, malnourished, elderly, women, children, disabled, and the poorest of the poor.

**SEC 3. Objectives.** – This Act pursues the following objectives:

- a) To promote optimal health and well-being of every Filipino by improved access to medicines; and
- b) To address the health needs of the marginalized sectors such as the poor, malnourished, elderly, women, children, and the disabled through the establishment of a Free Basic Medicine Assistance Program in all government health facilities nationwide.

**SEC 4. Establishment of Free Medicine Assistance Program.** – There shall be established a Free Medicine Assistance Program, hereinafter referred to as the “Libreng Gamot Program,” to be administered by the Department of Health (DOH) through government district hospitals, local health units and barangay health centers in all cities and municipalities, in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).



**SEC. 5. Eligible Beneficiaries.** – The Libreng Gamot Program shall be restricted to qualified poor recipients as certified by the barangay and the DSWD officials.

**SEC. 6. Availment of Free Medicines.** – Free medicines shall be made available in all government district hospitals, local health units and barangay health centers. These health facilities shall account for all the medicines released to qualified beneficiaries through the submission of quarterly reports to the DOH.

**SEC. 7. Appropriations.** – The amount needed for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations of the DOH. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

**SEC. 8. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – The DOH, in coordination with the DSWD and in consultation with the Philippine Medical Association (PMA), shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act within six (6) months for the effectivity hereof.

**SEC. 9. Separability Clause.** – If any part or provision of this Act shall be held unconstitutional or invalid, other provisions hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

**SEC. 10. Repealing Clause.** All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

**SEC. 11. Effectivity.** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,