

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

Eighteenth Congress
First Regular Session



HOUSE BILL NO. 6706

Introduced by Honorable Mark O. Go

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the Philippines in early 2020, and it continues to claim lives, and disrupt greatly the daily life of Filipinos. The pandemic threatens to erode all efforts and accomplishments made in upholding the standards of higher and technical-vocational education and training, and protecting the welfare of the students, faculty, and staff. Even with the lifting of the nationwide Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), it has become more evident that a complete return to how it was before the pandemic is impossible, at least in the near foreseeable future, it is thus incumbent upon the government to intervene and uphold quality and accessible higher and technical-vocational education and training for every Filipino, even in the midst of a global pandemic. It is in this regard that this bill seeks to provide a Recovery Assistance Package for an unhampered delivery of quality accessible tertiary education.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have roughly a month left to transition to the “new normal” in delivering higher and technical-vocational education and training, when a new semester opens in June. Containing the pandemic and preventing transmission among faculty, staff, and students require a massive shift from traditional modes of instruction to alternative strategies. Currently, only around 20% of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are ready for online learning, with the majority having limited ICT infrastructure. Given that purely online based instruction is not possible, even within the next two years, the Commission on Higher Education advises flexible learning arrangements. Meanwhile, most training and assessment programs offered by TESDA have been suspended, but enrolment in its online programs, particularly the TESDA online Program (TOP) has increased. In line with this, TESDA may capitalize on the increased interest of people on its online programs and blended learning, but doing so would also require facility and ICT systems and infrastructure upgrades, and faculty and trainers capability building. The proposed Recovery Assistance Package seeks to provide assistance for the upgrade and rehabilitation of ICT infrastructure and connectivity of state-run HEIs. Further the Package provides for complementing training programs for faculty members who will need to update their competencies not only in using alternative modes of instructions, but also in areas of curriculum development and research, as the schools and students navigate along the guidelines and restrictions in a new normal set up.

With the suspension of classes, the welfare of school faculty and staff members during this pandemic must also be a priority concern. Further, many private HEIs are considering closing down, should the continuous impediments on their cash flow persist, would lead to the loss of even more jobs. It is in this regard that the Package seeks to provide financial assistance for teaching and non-teaching personnel of higher and technical-vocational education institutions including job-order (JO) and contract-of-service (COS) employees.

It is feared that many students will soon be forced to seek gainful employment in order to help support their families who have been critically hit by the crisis. Many students will also have problems in migrating to online, and even flexible education, because of lack of the appropriate devices and poor connectivity. The Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges projects an estimate dropout of 59 thousand students as a result of the pandemic. There is a looming concern among students, that a shift towards alternative modes of education, primarily one that focuses much on online education, would further widen the inequality gap, to the prejudice of students from low-income households. In order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, the Package proposes the extension of zero percent (0%) loans and subsidies for students and faculty to be used for the acquisition of the needed electronic devices, or for payment of tuition and other fees which would allow them to continue their education in a flexible education system. The same assistance shall likewise be extended to students of technical and vocational courses, considering that the scholarship funds of TESDA has been realigned to support the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). The Package also provides for an increase in the amount of Tertiary Education Subsidy to accommodate students not covered in the Listahan 2.0 of the DSWD.

Apart from allocating a supplemental budget for the Recovery Assistance Package, this bill likewise seeks to ensure the release of funds already appropriated in the 2020 General Appropriation Act for the programs of CHED and TESDA. Furthermore, the bill seeks to create lending programs to be extended to private HEIs and TVIs for the purpose of installation, repair, or upgrade of their IT infrastructure.

The Recovery Assistance Package seeks to ensure that any change in the mode of instruction in public and private HEIs and TVIs would not in any way result to a downgrade in the quality of education, create unreasonable burden upon the faculty, and alienate students from vulnerable sectors of our society. In supporting the country's higher and technical-vocational education institutions, students, faculty, and staff, the bill seeks not only to supplement in the development of the body of policies that would govern colleges and universities during this pandemic, but ultimately to institute lasting reforms that would lift the state and quality of higher and technical education in this country to the standards of this technological-driven, and dynamic 21st century.

In view of the foregoing, the approval of this measure is earnestly sought.



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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR A RECOVERY ASSISTANCE PACKAGE FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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 “Recovery Assistance Package for Higher Education and Technical-Vocational Education and Training Act of 2020”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is declared as the policy of the State to establish, maintain, and support a quality, complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society.

Towards this end, the State shall implement programs and policies that would address the impact of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease (hereinafter referred as COVID-19) in the delivery of quality and accessible higher education and technical-vocational education and training.

SEC. 3. *Flexible/Bundled Learning System.* – The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) shall adopt and implement a flexible/bundled learning system that will utilize both digital and non digital technology and other open distance learning modalities, in consonance with the new normal in the delivery of higher education and technical-vocational education and training.

Flexible/bundled learning shall refer to the design and delivery of programs, courses, and learning interventions that address learners’ unique needs in terms of pace, place, process and products of learning.

SEC. 4. *Recovery Assistance Package.*- In ensuring the unhampered delivery of quality and accessible higher education and technical-vocational education and training, a Recovery Assistance Package (RAP) is hereby provided for for the following purposes:

- a.) Upgrading and rehabilitation of IT/internet system and infrastructure for online connectivity, including the installation of a learning management system (LMS) in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs) and TESDA Technology Institutions, necessary for the implementation of a flexible learning system.

For the SUCs and LUCs, an amount of One Billion Seventy Million Pesos (P1,070,000,000.00) shall be appropriated.

Two Hundred Sixty Million Seven Hundred Twenty Four Thousand Pesos (P260,724,000.00) for the upgrade of TESDA Mission Critical information System and Two Hundred Forty One Million Six Hundred Eighty Thousand Pesos (P241,680,000.00) for the upgrade of ICT in TESDA Technology Institutions shall be appropriated;

- b.) Trainings on Distance/Flexible Learning System for all teaching personnel in the higher education institutions (HEIs) and technical-vocational institutions (TVIs).

Two Hundred Forty Four Million Seven Hundred Seventy Thousand Pesos (P244,770,000.00) for capability building program for TVET trainers in flexible learning delivery shall be appropriated;

- c.) Financial assistance/subsidy for teaching and non-teaching personnel, trainers and assessors in public and private HEIs and TVIs affected by the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

Two Billion Four Hundred Sixty Six Million Pesos (P2,466,000,000.00) shall be appropriated for the public and private HEIs.

Two Hundred Thirty Seven Million Five Hundred Forty Thousand Pesos (P237,540,000.00) shall be appropriated for private TVIs, including job orders (JOs), contract of service (COS) and free lance competency assessors;

- d.) Provision of zero percent (0%) loans and subsidies for students/learners and faculty/trainers to be used for the acquisition of computers, laptops and other gadgets needed for online and blended education/ flexible learning system consistent with the provisions of RA 10650 or the Open Distance Learning Act, or for payment of tuition and other fees in private HEIs and TVIs.

Seventeen Billion Two Hundred Million Pesos (P17,200,000,000.00) shall be appropriated for the implementation of this paragraph; and

- e.) Additional budget allocation for Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) under Republic Act No. 10931 (UAQTE) to expand its coverage that will include students not covered by the Listahanan 2.0 as determined by DSWD.

Sixteen Billion Pesos (P16,000,000,000.00) shall be appropriated to cover 300,000 beneficiaries under CHED.

One Billion One Hundred Forty Million Pesos (P1,140,000,000.00) shall be appropriated to cover 30,000 learners under TESDA.

SEC. 5. *Discounted Rates for Internet Systems and Connectivity.* – The Department of Information and Communications Technology, in coordination with CHED and TESDA, shall negotiate with the internet service providers and telephone companies (TELCOS) for the reduction of rates and cost for IT/internet system and connectivity exclusive for HEIs and TVIs.

SEC. 6. *Release of Appropriated Funds for Higher Education and Technical-Vocational Education and Training.* – All funds appropriated for programs and projects under CHED and TESDA, including but not limited to the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) as provided under Republic Act No. 10931 otherwise known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), shall be immediately released without deduction and shall not be subject to re-alignment.

SEC. 7. *Temporary Bridging Loans.* – The government financial institutions (GFIs), Landbank of the Philippines (LBP) and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP), shall establish loan facilities and minimal interest rate terms for duly registered HEIs and TVIs for the purpose of installation, repair or upgrading of their IT/internet infrastructure and other requirements for the installation of flexible learning system.

The Department of Finance (DOF) and the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), in consultation with LBP and DBP, shall jointly issue the necessary rules and regulation for the implementation of this Section.

SEC. 8. *Appropriations.* – The sum of Thirty Eight Billion Eight Hundred Sixty One Million Pesos (P38,861,000,000.00) is hereby appropriated to supplement the Fiscal Year 2020 budget under Republic Act No. 11465, or the General Appropriations Act of 2020. This sum shall be appropriated as a recovery assistance package for the higher education and technical-vocational education and training sector affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, in accordance with the provisions set forth in this Act.

SEC. 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The Department of Budget and Management and the Department of Finance, in consultation with CHED and TESDA, shall promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 10. *Separability Clause.* – If any part or provision of this Act is held unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions or parts hereof which are not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SEC. 11. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, proclamations or administrative regulations that are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 12. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,