

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1730



Introduced by **Representative Ryan S. Recto**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This legislative measure seeks to establish a National Employment Assistance Program (NEAP) to ensure a sustained and institutionalized framework for providing temporary employment to members of vulnerable sectors. It shall ensure immediate income support for those who need it most, especially individuals who belong to the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

The Philippines has made significant economic strides in recent years and has earned a reputation as an emerging economy. With robust Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates, our country has positioned itself as one of the fastest-growing nations in Southeast Asia. It cannot be ignored, however, that despite these macroeconomic achievements, the prevailing challenge of poverty continues to haunt a substantial portion of the population. The gravity of this challenge is an issue that concerns every facet of national development and societal well-being. Despite recent economic gains, where the national poverty incidence among the population saw a decrease to 15.5% in 2023 from 18.1% in 2021 (thus lifting 2.4 million Filipinos above the poverty line), a significant portion of our fellow countrymen remain vulnerable. In January 2025, a survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS) reported that 63% of Filipino families consider themselves poor, the highest since the recorded self-rated poverty rate at 64% in November 2003. This widespread and deeply felt poverty undermines the country's potential as an emerging economy. It impedes human capital development, limits domestic consumption, strains public services and can even contribute to social instability.

Poverty in our country is not simply about the lack of jobs, but more importantly the lack of *quality jobs* and sustained income. The issue of underemployment, on one hand, affects millions who desire more work or better pay despite being technically employed. This underscores the fact that economic growth does not always translate into equitable opportunities. Vulnerable sectors like the agriculture and fishery and also indigenous peoples, face high poverty incidences. They are disproportionately

affected by factors like precarious, seasonal and low-wage work. Thus, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that hinders them to fully participate in the progress of the nation.

It is precisely the vision of this legislative measure to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Although the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) currently has existing programs like the *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers* (TUPAD) to provide temporary employment to vulnerable sectors, it is inherently limited by its nature as it is merely a special provision under the General Appropriations Act (GAA). Meaning, it could easily be discontinued or funding could be reduced based on legislative review and yearly budget priorities. Millions of those rely on such assistance could be left to uncertainty if this scenario were to occur. By institutionalizing the NEAP, the law could greatly provide for a sustained and dedicated initiative for anti-poverty that is free from the annual budgetary uncertainties.

The proposed measure seeks to provide temporary employment for a minimum of ten (10) days but not more than ninety (90) days in a calendar year to poor, disadvantaged or displaced individuals, as well as seasonal workers. It shall also cover individuals duly identified by the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (*Listahanan*). Those who qualify under the program shall receive compensation at the prevailing minimum wage, as determined by the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board (RTWPB) to guarantee decent and equitable remuneration for their labor. Employment activities under this program shall focus on the types of work that focus on community development and long-term resilience. This could come in the form of development or rehabilitation of agri-based livelihood assets, common service facilities, farm-to-market roads and vital social community projects like the repair of schools and health centers. Not only does this provide productive work and temporary income, but it also builds essential infrastructure and capabilities within impoverished communities.

Poverty remains a persisting and multifaceted issue that continues to haunt the average Filipino, manifesting not just as a lack of income but as a complex web of challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare and stable employment opportunities. It is then crucial that we create a more resilient and equitable labor market to help our fellow countrymen break away from the chains of poverty and build a future where every Filipino has the dignity of decent work and the means to live a life of quality and opportunity.

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



Ryan S. Recto
Representative
6th District, Batangas

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AN ACT
PROVIDING FOR A NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
APPROPRIATING 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 “*National Employment Assistance Program Act*”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is a declared policy of the State to promote a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation and free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment, a rising standard of living and an improved quality of life for all. Towards this end, the State shall provide Filipinos with opportunities for just and sufficient means of livelihood. The State shall likewise initiate meaningful employment assistance programs to qualified individuals of poor, disadvantaged or displaced households duly identified by the appropriate national agencies.

SEC. 3. *National Employment Assistance Program.* – There is hereby created a National Employment Assistance Program (NEAP), which shall provide temporary employment to qualified individuals who are poor, disadvantaged or displaced or seasonal workers who volunteer work for a minimum of ten (10) days but not more than ninety (90) days in a calendar year wherein the minimum and maximum period of engagement can cover a single activity or multiple activities spread out over the course of a calendar year: *Provided, That* qualified individuals may include subprofessionals.

Qualified individuals are not subject to the terms and conditions of regular employment and as such, shall not be deemed to have an employer-employee relationship with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), or any agency or institution who utilizes their services with respect to the Program.

SEC. 4. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- a) *Displaced Worker* refers to a worker in the formal and informal sector who became unemployed, underemployed or have lost livelihood as a result of closure of establishment, economic crisis, retrenchment, termination, natural disaster or calamity;
- b) *Poor* refers to individuals and families whose income fall below the poverty threshold as defined by the government or cannot afford, in a sustained manner, to provide their minimum basic needs of food, health, education, housing and other essential amenities of life, or those who have been identified as poor by the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction (NHTS-PR), also known as the Listahanan;
- c) *Qualified Individual* refers to willing and able Filipino citizens who are at least fifteen (15) years of age: *Provided*, That individuals between the ages of fifteen (15) and eighteen (18) years may only qualify by first obtaining consent from their parent/s or legal guardian and can only be employed in non-hazardous work environments in accordance with the Labor Code; and
- d) *Seasonal Worker* refers to a worker who performs work or service that is only for a specific period of time or season of the year.

SEC. 5. *Qualifications for Availment of Employment Assistance.* – The DOLE shall take the lead in the overall implementation of the NEAP.

The DOLE may conduct a preliminary assessment of all poor, disadvantaged or displaced individuals, including seasonal workers who signify interest in undertaking work in order to determine eligibility and inclusion in the NEAP. The assessment shall also take into consideration the inherent knowledge, skills, capacities and capabilities of potential qualified participants so as to properly determine the type and nature of projects that are most suited to them and their respective communities.

The DOLE shall facilitate basic knowledge and skills orientation and capacity-building trainings and seminars as deemed necessary towards project development for qualified participants. The local government units (LGUs) and program partners concerned may make available for use any tools and equipment necessary for project development to the qualified individuals.

SEC. 6. *Types of Work and Activities under the Program.* – Employment activities for this purpose shall be designed to mobilize eligible individuals, families and communities to finish a project within a given time period. These projects may include, but are not limited, to the following:

- a) Development, rebuilding or rehabilitation of agri-based livelihood assets, damaged, destroyed or lost due to natural disasters, such as desilting of irrigation canals, development of paddy dikes and rehabilitation of water impounding dams;
- b) Development or rehabilitation of common service facilities, which are being shared and used by poor families as production or consolidation centers like post-harvest facilities, public markets, display centers and fish ports;
- c) Development or rehabilitation of physical assets to open up access to areas necessary to transport rural products, such as contribution of farm-to-market roads and bridges;
- d) Protection of natural and productive assets through mitigation and disaster risk reduction measures, such as mangrove planting and rehabilitation, tree planting, seedling preparation, re-forestation and similar activities; and
- e) Social community projects, such as repair, maintenance or improvement of common public facilities and infrastructure such as schools and health centers, debris clearing, declogging of canals, debris segregation and materials recovery, stockpiling and clearing.

The DOLE shall provide an updated list of projects that may be undertaken as well as taken as projects not covered under this Act. This list shall be readily made available to potentially qualified individuals who have expressed their desire to participate in the NEAP.

SEC. 7. *Rate of Assistance.* – Every person qualified under this Program shall be entitled to receive compensation for each day of work at the prevailing minimum wage by the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board (RTWPH) concerned. LGUs may also provide for additional allowances to the beneficiaries in order to cover for other expenses such as transportation and food.

SEC. 8. *Appropriations.* -- The Secretary of Labor and Employment shall include in the DOLE's programs the implementation of this Act, the initial funding of which shall be charged against the current year's appropriations of the DOLE. Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

In addition, the DOLE may accept donations, contributions or grants from foreign and local persons, institutions and governments, among others, for the implementation of the NEAP.

SEC. 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days after the approval of this Act, the Secretary of the DOLE shall issue the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 10. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision, section, or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, such judgment shall not affect, invalidate, or impair any other provisions, sections, or parts hereof.

SEC. 11. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, orders, issuances, circulars, rules and regulations or parts hereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 12. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,