

[REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11509, December 23, 2020]

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM FOR DESERVING STUDENTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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 "Doktor Para sa Bayan Act".

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of health of the people through the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies for the appropriate generation, recruitment, retraining, regulation, retention and reassessment of the health workforce making it more attuned to the needs of the population. It is also the declared policy of the State to promote social justice by expanding access to quality education and creating opportunities for underprivileged individuals.

Towards this end, the State shall establish a medical scholarship and return service that will help deserving medical students pursue medical education and training in the field of health and medicine who shall eventually render services in government public health offices or government hospitals in their hometown or in any municipality in their home province or in any underserved municipality in any province, as part of their integration into the public health and medical service system. This shall ensure the availability of doctors who will provide quality basic, promotive, preventive and curative health care services in every municipality in the country, especially the underserved, remote, economically underdeveloped, distressed, conflict-afflicted and geographically disadvantaged areas.

SEC. 3. *Establishment of the Medical Scholarship and Return Service Program.* - There shall be established a Medical Scholarship and Return Service Program (MSRS) Program for deserving students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or in partner private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in regions where there are no SUCs offering a medical course: *Provided,* That the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) may designate more than one (1) partner higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region, including regions where there are existing SUCs offering the Doctor of Medicine program as deemed necessary, upon consultation with the Department of Health (DOH).

In all cases, qualified applicants from municipalities without government physicians shall be prioritized in the allocation of scholarship slots to ensure the assignment of at least one (1) doctor for every municipality in the country.

SEC. 4. *Coverage.* - The MSRS Program established under this Act shall be made to deserving Filipino students who want to pursue a degree in Doctor of Medicine.

The student financial assistance for the MSRS Program shall include the following:

- (a) Free tuition and other school fees;
- (b) Allowance for prescribed books, supplies and equipment;
- (c) Clothing or uniform allowance;
- (d) Allowance for dormitory or boarding house accommodation;
- (e) Transportation allowance;
- (f) Internship fees, including financial assistance during mandatory internship;
- (g) Medical board review fees;
- (h) License fees;
- (i) Annual medical insurance; and
- (j) Other education-related miscellaneous subsistence or living allowances.

SEC. 5. *Qualification Requirements.* - An applicant for the MSRS Program shall possess the following qualifications:

- (a) Must be a Filipino citizen residing in the Philippines;
- (b) Must be a graduating student or a graduate of an appropriate undergraduate program identified as a prerequisite for a Doctor of Medicine degree, from any HEI duly recognized by the CHED, including a direct entrant to the Integrated Liberal Arts and Medicine (INTARMED) Program who satisfactorily completes the first two (2) years of the Program: *Provided*, That deserving incoming second year medical students and those in the higher year levels of the Doctor of Medicine Program shall also be covered under this Act, as long as they complied with the academic requirements and retention policies of the school in the past terms preceding their scholarship application;
- (c) Must have passed the entrance examination and complied with other related requirements for admission into a Doctor of Medicine degree in the SUC or PHEI where the scholar intends to enroll, as well as the other requirements of the CHED and the DOH; and
- (d) Must have obtained a National Medical Admission Tests (NMAT) score mandated by the CHED and required by the SUC or PHEI where the student intends to enroll in.

SEC. 6. *Conditions for the Grant of Scholarship.* - Deserving students accepted to the MSRS Program shall be subject to the following conditionalities:

- (a) Must sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of the scholarship on a form prescribed by the CHED and the DOH pursuant to the provisions of this Act;
- (b) Must carry the full load of subjects prescribed per semester by the SUC or PHEI, and shall not, under any circumstance, drop a course which will result in underloading;

(c) Must finish the entire Doctor of Medicine Program within the prescribed time frame of the SUC or the PHEI where the scholar is enrolled in, subject to the retention policies of the SUC or the PHEI: *Provided*, That the deserving student accepted to the MSRS Program, before actual enrollment in the first semester as a scholar, may be allowed for valid and justifiable reasons, to defer enrollment or to file a leave of absence: *Provided, further*, That a scholar who is already enrolled, may be allowed, for valid and justifiable reasons, to file a leave of absence;

(d) Must undertake the mandatory internship in the SUC's or PHEI's base hospital upon graduation from the Doctor of Medicine Program for scholars under a four (4)-year Doctor of Medicine Program, or on the last year of the Doctor of Medicine Program for scholars under a five (5)-year program: *Provided*, That in the event that no more slots are available in such SUC's or PHEI's base hospital, the mandatory internship program must be undertaken in a DOH-accredited public health facility or hospital or any accredited government health facility or hospital, subject to compliance with the requirements of the association which credits an internship program;

(e) Must take the board examination within a maximum period of one (1) year after completion of the mandatory internship program; and

(f) Must render return of service as provided under Section 8 of this Act.

The scholar who fails to pass the licensure examination within one (1) year after graduation and completion of the mandatory internship and other academic requirements shall shoulder all the necessary expenses for the succeeding professional licensure examinations.

SEC. 7. Disqualifications. - The scholarship grant shall terminate, and the scholar shall repay the full cost of scholarship and related benefits received, including all the expenses incurred during the participation in the scholarship program in case of the following circumstances:

(a) If the scholar accepts another scholarship from other government or private agency or entity while enjoying the benefits under this Act;

(b) If the scholar fails to meet the academic requirements or to complete the course within the prescribed period without valid cause as may be determined by the SUC or PHEI, or the CHED or DOH through appropriate regulations, such as, but not limited to, absence without notice, willful neglect or other causes within the control of the scholar;

(c) If the scholar fails to obtain a passing grade in the Physician Licensure Examination (PLE) within five (5) years from the time the scholar has completed the mandatory internship program: *Provided*, That, instead of repaying the full cost of the scholarship and related expenses, the scholar whose scholarship status has been terminated under Section 7(b) or 7(c) of this Act may opt to engage in work within the public health service system, such as engaging in health-related research work for the government or teaching health-related subjects in a public educational institution, or being integrated into the public health service system for a period prorated to the number of years of mandatory return service provided under this Act: *Provided, further*, That the alternative return service shall exclude the period of mandatory internship and residency training that is undertaken in a private health institution or facility; and

(d) While being a scholar, the scholar commits gross misconduct in a manner that would bring significant damage to the SUC or PHEI concerned or to the community as a whole.

SEC. 8. *Mandatory Return Service and Integration of the Scholar into the Public Health and Medical Service System.* - Upon passing the PLE administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and conferment by the PRC of the license to practice the medical profession, the scholar shall be integrated into the public health and medical service system, through the DOH, and shall receive the appropriate civil service rank, salary and related benefits. The scholar shall serve in a government public health office, government hospital, or any accredited government health facility in the scholar's hometown or, in the absence of a need thereat, in any municipality within the scholar's home province, or in any underserved municipality closest to the scholar's hometown determined by the DOH as a priority area, for at least one (1) year for every scholarship year availed of: *Provided*, That scholars from municipalities with no government physicians shall render the return service work in the scholar's hometown: *Provided, further*, That the scholar who assumed the slot intended for a resident of another municipality, no resident of which qualified to be a scholar under this Act, shall render the return service work in the same municipality where the slot was originally intended: *Provided, finally*, That in all cases, the scholar shall only be required to serve in such municipality if no threat to the scholar's life is present.

The scholar shall render the mandatory return service within six (6) years from the time of passing the PLE or those who have availed of a four (4)-year program, and seven (7) years for those who availed of a five (5)-year program: *Provided, however*, That in times of pandemic or public health emergency, the DOH may require the scholars to serve in any public health office or a government hospital where their services may be needed: *Provided, further*, That the mandatory return service and integration into the public health and medical service system under this Act shall be separate and distinct from the mandatory internship required prior to taking the license examination for physicians: *Provided, further*, That the number of years served by the scholar in the public health and medical service system as part of the return service requirements, if any, of the SUC or PHEI concerned, or health or medical research within the Philippines in a public institution or any international organization accredited by the DOH for work for the underprivileged areas within the Philippines, or full-time teaching in a public institution shall be counted in the required number of years of return service under this Act: *Provided, finally*, That the physician shall receive appropriate salaries and other benefits for service rendered under the mandatory integration into the public health and medical service.

SEC. 9. *Sanctions.* - A physician who has availed of the the MSRS Program but fails or refuses to comply with the mandatory return service and integration provided under this Act shall be required to pay two (2) times the full cost of scholarship, including other benefits and expenses incurred by reason of participation in the MSRS Program.

In case of nonpayment, as provided in the preceding paragraph, the PRC shall deny the renewal of the physician's license: *Provided*, That the abovementioned penalties shall not apply to physicians who fail to comply with the required return service on account, or by reason of, severe or serious illness.