

Comments on the consolidated Senate Bill No. 69 entitled: *AN ACT INSTITUTING SERVICES FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IN SUPPORT OF¹ INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, ESTABLISHING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LEARNING² RESOURCE CENTERS FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (CYSNs) IN ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS DIVISIONS⁴, PROVIDING FOR STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES⁵, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR*

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On Section 2.D. On whether we should use any of these words - “special, differentiated, unique” pertaining to the requirements of LWDs in the following:

(D) consider the special requirements of LWDs in the formulation of inclusive educational policies and programs

We recommend using more general term if not just “requirements” (so it should read “consider the requirements of LWDs in the formulation of inclusive educational policies and programs”) because LWDs are diverse in their disability and circumstances; their requirements are also diverse – these can be both special (relevant to their type of disability or impairment) and non-special. We must not assume that all their requirements are special or unique or differentiated. Some LWDs may already have access to relevant learning devices or equipment, but they might just be in need of a larger space (in the case of mobility-impaired learners); some may just be in need of small subsidy for transport or school supplies which the family cannot afford. The bill must provide a room for local school boards and other stakeholders to determine the requirements of LWD and address such requirements more effectively. Putting an adjective to describe their requirements may act as a limiting factor.

On Section 2.F (Line 16). There was a move to change the word “for” into “of” -

(F) promote and support the provision by learning institutions, especially higher learning institutions, of auxiliary services that will facilitate the learning process for LWDs, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

We recommend retaining the word “for.” Our argument is more a matter of scope than perspective. We interpret that using the word “of” is a subset of using “for.” To explain, when we say the policy promotes auxiliary services that will facilitate the learning process **for** LWDs – we are encompassing all relevant learning processes for the benefit

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of LWDs, not just the learning process **of** LWDs. This means that auxiliary services that facilitate even the learning processes of non-LWDs, regular students, non-LWD teachers, and school officials, can be promoted if these are for the benefit of LWDs' learning process. This recognizes that enhancing the learning process of LWDs (which includes their full inclusion into the society) entails not just enhancing the learning process **of** LWDs, but also improving, in a more general sense, the learning systems of people and organizations around them. If a non-LWD family member of LWD needs to acquire some basic skills in sign language or braille because he/she wants to aid in the LWD's learning process, this provision of the proposed policy is actually saying that it is promoting that person's access to auxiliary services because this will benefit the learning process of his/her kin who is a LWD.

If we use "of" to gain focus, it is possible that people will interpret this as limited only to those that directly improve the learning process **of** LWDs. But if we want to be inclusive, we must view the learning process of LWDs from a broader perspective. This is because their needs are rather complex and unique; there is a much deeper learning process which the society, in general, must undergo before it can be truly inclusive of LWDs. So, we must think of ways out of the box. Also, by using "for," we are not saying that LWDs do not own their learning process. The proposed policy has been clear about empowering LWDs and this does not, in any way, violate that.

Section 3.G. Definition of educational intervention in:

(G) Further develop the system for identification, referral, and intervention for LWDs initiated by the Department of Education...

We would like to raise a concern that interventions needed by LWDs may not be confined to educational interventions per se, and therefore we strongly propose that the policy must take this into account. For many LWDs, the cause of their inability to learn is sometimes physiological or neurological such that if the cause is not dealt with, their ability to learn is adversely affected. It is then important to clarify (perhaps in the definitions) that interventions, though may be referring to educational interventions, may include auxiliary interventions (e.g. speech therapy, occupational therapy) that may be needed by LWDs for a more meaningful and effective learning process. We hope that there would be an inter-agency collaboration among DepEd, DSWD and DOH. DSWD can look after their social welfare needs while DOH can take care of other interventions that may be health-related in nature. If interventions to be provided to LWDs will be limited to educational interventions only, we may fail to achieve the objective of inclusive education.