

**COMMENT ON HOUSE BILLS NO. 23, 42, 104, 120, 604, 1913, 2313,
PROPOSING AMENDMENTS TO REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11310 OR THE
*PANTAWID PAMILYANG PILIPINO PROGRAM (4PS) ACT***

Prepared by: Michael R.M. Abrigo and Kris Ann Melad ¹

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The series of bills filed in the House of Representatives – House Bills No. (HBN) 23, 42, 104, 120, 604, 1913, 2313 – reflect the recognition of the importance of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)* in safeguarding poor households against economic vulnerability. Collectively, these proposed measures seek to recalibrate benefit levels, introduce new components, protect transfers from inflationary erosion, and enhance administrative responsiveness of the program. Taken together, the proposals embody a strong legislative commitment to strengthening the 4Ps as a platform for human capital development.

Experiences documented in recent program evaluations suggests, however, that the effectiveness of such reforms will hinge not only on the size of transfers but also on how well they are targeted, monitored, and aligned with service delivery capacity. In this light, the following observations may help refine and maximize the impact of the proposed amendments.

On raising grants and introducing new benefit components

Several bills (HBN 42, 104, 120, 1913) propose to raise existing education and health grants, while others introduce new benefit components, such as early childhood nutrition grant (HBN2313), food and nutrition allowances (HBN 23, 104, 120, 1913), and livelihood training completion grant (HBN 604).

Restoring the real value of benefits addresses inflationary erosion, estimated at about 21 percent since the enactment of the 4Ps Act in 2019. New components, particularly those targeting health and nutrition, align well with global evidence that early investments in child health and nutrition yield high returns. Livelihood top-ups also resonate with long-standing calls for stronger exit and graduation strategies.

While the proposed increase in grant amounts is commendable, it likewise calls for improvements in program implementation to ensure that the additional resources translate into better health and nutrition outcomes. One area of concern is compliance monitoring. In recent years, the number of young children and pregnant women monitored by the program has declined, which may be evident from departures in age distribution between the poor and those in the 4Ps (see Figure 1). This weakens the enforcement of health-related conditionalities, particularly for younger children. Any increase in benefits should therefore be accompanied by

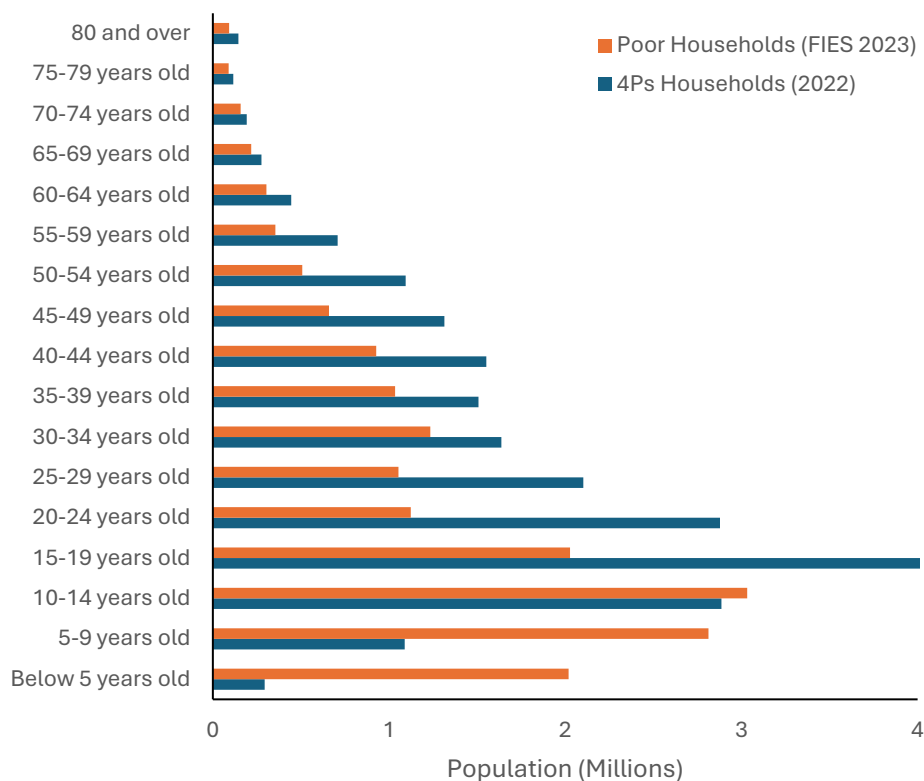
¹ Michael Ralph M. Abrigo, PhD, Senior Research Fellow and Ms. Kris Anne Mellad, Supervising Research Specialist at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)

more systematic and continuous updating of the registry of pregnant women and children aged 0 to 5 years, so that they are fully captured within the compliance monitoring mechanism.

The need for accurate and timely registry updates is reinforced by results from the program’s third impact evaluation. Findings suggest that non-monitored children within beneficiary households tend to have worse outcomes compared not only to their monitored siblings but to children from non-beneficiary households as well. While further investigation may be necessary to tease out specific mechanisms, this underscores the need for up-to-date information on the program’s target beneficiaries.

Finally, it bears emphasizing that improvements in child health and nutrition rely not only on the size of transfers but also on the availability and accessibility of quality maternal and child health services, particularly in the first 1,000 days of life. If reducing stunting, a marker of chronic undernutrition, is to be a central objective of the 4Ps, then increases in cash support must be matched with strengthened service delivery at the local level.

Figure 1. Age distribution of 4Ps and poor households



Note: Age distribution of poor households is based on the 2023 Family Income and Expenditure Survey by the Philippine Statistics Authority, while that for 4Ps households is based on DSWD administrative data.

On the institutionalization of a rice subsidy

HBN 1913 proposes the codification of a rice subsidy in the 4Ps Act. While a rice subsidy is already integrated as part of the 4Ps, the proposed amendment would ensure its continued implementation under the 4Ps law.

Within the program's logic, cash transfers encourage investments in children's health and education through compliance with conditions. Currently, however, the rice subsidy is provided to households that meet either health or education conditionalities. Policymakers may wish to consider linking this subsidy to other program requirements. For example, it could be used to encourage the school enrollment of non-monitored children, as recent evidence suggests that non-monitored children tend to achieve worse outcomes than their siblings who are tracked. Alternatively, the subsidy could be tied to specific health and nutrition actions such as postnatal care, dietary diversity, or immunization.

It may also be timely to revisit the amount of the proposed rice subsidy. The proposed value of PHP600 per household has remained unchanged since its introduction in 2019, despite inflation eroding the real value of program benefits. Adjusting its level would help restore its intended purchasing power. While there may be concerns about potential perverse effects from promoting rice consumption and raising income of 4Ps beneficiaries on local market prices of rice; evidence to date does not support such an effect. A study by Filmer et al. (2018), for instance, found no impact on rice prices even in areas with high 4Ps coverage.

On price indexing and review periods

Several bills propose shortening the review of grant levels relative to inflation from six years in the 4Ps Act to three years (HBN 1913) or one year (HBN 104, 120). A shorter review period would allow the program to adjust more quickly to rising prices, helping ensure that the grants remain adequate to cushion households from shocks and prevent the erosion of earlier gains in beneficiary wellbeing. More frequent assessments could also minimize the welfare losses beneficiaries incur when grant values lag behind the cost of living.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments to the 4Ps Act represent a timely opportunity to reinforce the program's role as the country's primary social protection platform. By restoring the real value of benefits, introducing targeted nutrition and livelihood components, institutionalizing the rice subsidy, and adjusting review periods to keep pace with inflation, the bills collectively seek to make the 4Ps more responsive to the needs of poor households. These measures can help sustain the program's gains in human capital investment and resilience.

To fully realize these benefits, however, increases in support must be matched with improvements in implementation. Strengthening the updating of beneficiary registries, ensuring that all eligible children and pregnant women are consistently monitored, and aligning expanded transfers with the delivery of quality health and nutrition services will be critical. Addressing these operational challenges could help ensure that the proposed reforms translate into genuine improvements in child health, nutrition, and education outcomes, particularly during the crucial first 1,000 days of life.

Taken together, the bills provide an opportunity not only to recalibrate the adequacy of benefits but also to refine the systems that underpin the 4Ps. With careful attention to these complementary measures, Congress can ensure that the program continues to deliver on its promise of breaking the cycle of poverty and investing in the next generation of Filipinos.

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