

Comments on Proposed Legislative Measures on the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)

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02 March 2026

This document provides comments on four Senate Bills (S.B.) filed during the Twentieth Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, First Regular Session. All four bills seek to amend or supplement Republic Act No. 11310, otherwise known as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Act. The bills address concerns about benefit adequacy, adult human capital development, program fragmentation, and political exploitation of social protection funds.

Overview of the Bills

1. S.B. No. 31 (Senator Lacson) - Expanded Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Act of 2025

Introduced on July 25, 2025, S.B. No. 31 proposes the creation of the **Pantawid Pag-Asa**, a new program pillar within the 4Ps framework that would consolidate existing social amelioration or "ayuda" programs under a single administrative structure. Programs currently implemented across multiple agencies, namely the Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita Program (AKAP), Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS), Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD), and the Food Stamp Program, would be transferred to DSWD under the Pantawid Pag-Asa. Eligibility for the Pantawid Pag-Asa would not be limited to households formally classified as poor. Any person or family experiencing economic distress due to crisis, sudden income loss, calamity, illness, or displacement would qualify. The bill includes provisions against political exploitation of the program, with perpetual absolute disqualification from public office as the penalty for violations. It also mandates a centralized social protection database using the PhilSys Card Number (PCN) as the reference identifier. Cash transfer amounts under the Pantawid Pag-Asa are to be based on PIDS recommendations, in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). The reporting cycle to Congress is changed from triennial to annual.

2. S.B. No. 1344 (Senator Hontiveros) - 4Ps Parent Leaders' Adult Education Program

S.B. No. 1344 mandates the creation of a free Adult Education Program for 4Ps parent-leaders and their substitutes, defined as adult household beneficiaries at least 21 years old. DepEd, TESDA, and CHED would jointly design and deliver the program, covering basic education completion, skills development, and pathways to higher education or entrepreneurship. Delivery modes may include face-to-face instruction, modular and distance learning, and micro-credentialing through Family Development Sessions. Parent-leaders or their substitutes would receive a monthly allowance of at least PHP 500 for transportation and meals. Graduates and completers would receive priority access

to higher education, livelihood, employment, and other related government programs. Participation is voluntary and is not proposed as a condition for benefit entitlement.

3. S.B. No. 1487 (Senator Estrada) - Expanded Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (E4Ps) Act

S.B. No. 1487 proposes several amendments to the existing law. Key provisions include: (a) a three-year extension of program retention for household-beneficiaries who remain poor after the seven-year maximum period, as assessed using the Standardized Targeting System; (b) an increase in the maximum covered age from 18 to 22 years, to extend benefits to children enrolled in technical-vocational or higher education; (c) increases in all CCT grant amounts, with the elementary grant raised from PHP 300 to PHP 500 per child per month, the junior high school grant from PHP 500 to PHP 700, and the senior high school grant from PHP 700 to PHP 900; (d) a new food and nutrition grant of at least PHP 1,000 per month; (e) a community mobilization grant of at least PHP 500 per month for adult education expenses; (f) inclusion of households with undernourished children aged zero to six as eligible beneficiaries; (g) prioritization of food-poor households in beneficiary selection; (h) an after-care program for exiting and graduated beneficiaries; and (i) a formal Grievance Redress System (GRS) at the national, regional, provincial, and cluster levels. The bill also changes the PIDS review cycle for the adjustment of cash grant values from every six years to annually.

4. S.B. No. 1496 (Senator Lapid) - An Act Promoting Entrepreneurship and Livelihood in 4Ps

Also received on November 11, 2025, S.B. No. 1496 adds entrepreneurship and livelihood training as a condition for continued program entitlement. At least one responsible person per household-beneficiary must complete at least two entrepreneurship or livelihood seminars within the second year of enrollment. Beneficiaries who complete this requirement would gain access to DTI assistance for establishing micro and small enterprises. The bill also proposes a new electric utility grant of at least PHP 500 per year per household, to be channeled through the National Electrification Administration (NEA) and distributed to electric cooperatives.

Comments and Recommendations

We support the Senate's initiative to strengthen and expand the 4Ps program. The four bills address dimensions of program design that research and evaluation evidence have identified as areas for improvement, including benefit adequacy, adult learning, program fragmentation, and accountability. The following comments draw on available evidence from PIDS impact evaluations and related studies.

1. Benefit Adequacy and Inflation Adjustment

The PIDS recommendations use the consumer price index (CPI) for bottom 30 percent income households published by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This index more accurately reflects the price conditions faced by 4Ps beneficiaries than the general population CPI, since poor households spend a larger share of their budget on food and other basic necessities. Because 4Ps grants are delivered directly to beneficiary households in cash rather than in kind, their real value is directly eroded by price increases. Using this methodology, PIDS estimated that the purchasing power of grants had declined by approximately 26 percent from 2019 to 2025.

The cumulative impact of this erosion on household welfare has been substantial. For a household with one elementary, one junior high school, and one senior high school student maintaining full compliance, the total loss in real grant value from 2019 to 2024 amounts to PHP 18,544, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Simulated loss in real value of 4Ps grants, 2019 to 2024

Year	Real value of grants in 2019 pesos (PHP)	Annual deficit in real value from 2019 value (PHP)
2019 (starting year)	31,200	-
2020	30,424	776
2021	29,194	2,006
2022	27,384	3,816
2023	25,827	5,373
2024	24,626	6,574
Total loss 2019-2024	-	18,544

Source: Abrigo and Melad (2025). Maximum benefit of PHP 31,200 is based on a household with one elementary, one junior high school, and one senior high school student with full compliance. Values use the CPI for bottom 30 percent income households from PSA.

Based on this analysis, PIDS recommended the following inflation-adjusted grant amounts to restore the 2019 purchasing power of 4Ps transfers, as presented to the NAC Technical Working Group in November 2025 (Table 2).

Table 2. PIDS recommended inflation-adjusted 4Ps cash grant amounts as of November 2025

Type of grant	RA 11310 amount (PHP/month)	Inflation-adjusted grant amounts (PHP) as of August 2025 ¹	PIDS recommended amount (PHP/month) ²
Elementary	300	381	400
Junior High School	500	634	650
Senior High School	700	888	900
Health/FDS grant	750	952	1,000
Rice subsidy	600	761	800

Source: Abrigo and Melad (2025). Notes: 1/ Computed based on CPI among bottom 30 percent income households from 2019 until August 2025 based on latest available PSA data at the time of estimation. 2/ Recommended amounts are rounded up to the nearest PHP 50 for administrative efficiency.

The proposed education grant amounts in S.B. No. 1487 are close to the PIDS recommendations, though the bill proposes a higher elementary grant (PHP 500) than the PIDS-recommended PHP 400. PIDS analysis indicates that increases to PHP 400 for elementary, PHP 650 for junior high school, and PHP 900 for senior high school would be sufficient to restore the 2019 purchasing power of those grants. These adjustments are best understood as a restoration of real grant value rather than a program expansion since the grants have not changed in nominal terms since RA 11310 was enacted in 2019.

PIDS supports the proposal in S.B. No. 1487 to shorten the PIDS review cycle from every six years to annually. The figures in Table 1 show that the annual deficit grows each year where grant amounts remain unchanged. A yearly review cycle would keep grant values closer to their real levels over time, reducing the welfare loss that accumulates between adjustments. The proposed budget floor formula in S.B. No. 1487, expressed as the maximum annual conditional cash grant per beneficiary household multiplied by the number of eligible beneficiaries, is a

reasonable safeguard against under-appropriation in the General Appropriations Act.

2. Adult Education and Livelihood: Voluntary Program vs. Conditionality

Three of the four bills address adult education and livelihood development, but with different approaches. Senate Bill No. 1344 treats adult education as a voluntary program supported by monthly allowances, S.B. No. 1487 makes it a condition for continued benefit entitlement, while S.B. No. 1496 requires completion of at least two entrepreneurship or livelihood seminars as a conditionality starting in the second year of enrollment.

The motivation for these interventions is supported by evidence. Data from the Fourth Impact Evaluation (IE4)¹ of the 4Ps illustrates the extent of the human capital gap among adult beneficiaries. Among adult household members aged 21 and above in 4Ps households², 87 percent reported having no professional, technical, or occupational skills. Of the 13 percent who reported having occupational skills, only 65 percent held a formal certification for those skills, meaning that about 35 percent had skills that were not formally recognized. Taken together, these figures suggest that the large majority of adult 4Ps members lack both the skills and the credentials needed to access formal employment, and that upskilling interventions without a certification component would leave a significant share of completers without qualifications recognized in the labor market.

However, we recommend caution in imposing adult education or livelihood participation as a condition for continued benefit entitlement. The availability and quality of adult education and livelihood training programs may vary across localities, and access constraints are likely to be more pronounced in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). Before any new conditionality is introduced, it is important to assess whether training and education opportunities are actually available in the areas where beneficiaries reside, and whether local institutions and service providers have the capacity to absorb additional demand. Making compliance a requirement in localities where these conditions are not yet met risks penalizing beneficiaries for gaps in public service delivery rather than for lack of effort or willingness.

Alongside the question of conditionality, the proponents may also consider how the adult education provisions in these bills relate to existing government programs with similar objectives, including the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) of the DSWD, and other upskilling initiatives of the government. There is a risk of overlapping in program objectives and target beneficiaries across these initiatives, making inter-agency coordination essential to ensure coherent service delivery and avoid imposing redundant requirements on the same households.

Additionally, the design of the adult education and upskilling programs would benefit from ensuring that completions result in formally recognized credentials. Certifications and assessments are important because completions that are not formally recognized have limited value in the labor market and do not improve beneficiary access to employment or further education. It would be worth specifying in the bills that completions under both ALS and TESDA pathways, and other relevant programs will result in recognized credentials, and that assessments are conducted as a standard part of program delivery rather than as optional add-

¹ Survey data were collected from September 2024 to February 2025 among households near the poverty threshold, sampled in accordance with the regression discontinuity design used in the Fourth Impact Evaluation. These estimates reflect conditions among households close to the eligibility cutoff and may not be representative of the broader 4Ps beneficiary population.

² Sample includes 8,603 individuals 21 years old or older

ons.

Lastly, we support the inclusion of a cash allowance to offset transportation and other attendance costs. Both the community mobilization grant in S.B. No. 1487 (PHP 500 per month) and the monthly allowance in S.B. No. 1344 (PHP 500 per month) are appropriate in direction. The adequacy of these amounts will, however, vary by location, particularly in areas where travel distances are significant, and thus, may be periodically reviewed.

3. Program Duration and the Retention Extension

S.B. No. 1487 proposes allowing households that remain poor after the seven-year maximum period to stay in the program for up to three additional years, subject to reassessment using the Standardized Targeting System. This responds to concerns that the fixed program duration may not be sufficient for households that have not yet achieved stable improvements in welfare.

Evidence from the Third Wave Impact Evaluation of the 4Ps (Orbeta et al., 2021) and ongoing work under the Fourth Impact Evaluation (IE4) documents program effects on school enrollment, health service use, and nutritional outcomes. These effects, however, are not uniform across beneficiary households. Outcomes vary by area of residence, household composition, and the age of children at program entry, reflecting the diversity of conditions among beneficiary families. This variation suggests that a single fixed program duration applied to all households may not adequately account for the range of circumstances that beneficiaries face. Households in more disadvantaged situations, including those in geographically isolated areas or with younger children at enrollment, may need a longer period of support to achieve gains that better-positioned households can reach within the standard seven-year period.

The proposal to limit the retention extension to households still classified as poor by the Standardized Targeting System is reasonable, as it ties continued support to verified need rather than allowing blanket extensions. At the same time, the extension may include clear criteria not only for entry but also for exit, to ensure that households that have made sufficient progress do not remain in the program longer than needed. Graduation assessments should be rigorous enough to distinguish between households that still need support and those ready to transition out, including through referral to after-care and livelihood programs.

On the proposal to extend coverage to children aged up to 22 enrolled in technical-vocational education and training (TVET) or higher education, we recognize the intent to support children who have continued into post-secondary education. However, this expansion has cost implications worth carefully assessing before enactment. Existing programs already provide support for post-secondary education among students from poor households, including the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act and tuition-free provisions in state universities and colleges. Rather than extending the 4Ps cash transfer to cover post-secondary students, the proponents may wish to consider whether improving coordination between 4Ps and ensuring that graduating beneficiaries are prioritized for referral to these existing programs would be a more cost-effective and practical way to achieve the same goal.

4. Food and Nutrition Grant and Undernourished Children

The proposal in S.B. No. 1487 to add a food and nutrition grant of PHP 1,000 per month and to include households with undernourished children aged zero to six as eligible beneficiaries is grounded in evidence on early childhood nutrition. The first 1,000 days of life, from conception to a child's second birthday, are a period when nutritional interventions have lasting effects on

cognitive development, health, and educational outcomes.

Evidence from the Fourth Impact Evaluation (IE4) of the 4Ps, which used a randomized cohort design exploiting an 18-month gap in program rollout between early-benefit and delayed-benefit barangays, provides insights into the conditions under which nutrition and health gains from cash transfers are more likely to be achieved (Melad, Abrigo, and Diola, forthcoming). The study found that differences between early-benefit and delayed-benefit groups in stunting, thinness, and the incidence of common childhood illnesses among children aged 10 to 14 were not statistically significant, with the authors noting that the 18-month timing difference and variation in local infrastructure and program monitoring intensity across communities may have influenced these results. The findings suggest that the quality and complementary nature of health and nutrition services may matter as much as the transfers themselves, and that cash grants are more likely to produce meaningful outcomes when paired with consistently monitored, timely, and holistic early-childhood interventions from conception onward.

We recommend that the food and nutrition grant be accompanied by strengthened coordination with the Department of Health and local health units to ensure that the supply of quality maternal and child health services keeps pace with expanded program coverage. The grant amount may also be periodically reviewed to confirm that it remains sufficient to support meaningful improvements in the dietary intake of affected households. Moreover, it is important that the inclusion of undernourished children as eligible beneficiaries is supported by monitoring mechanisms that track health and nutrition outcomes at the household level.

5. Program Consolidation and the Pantawid Pag-Asa

Efforts to consolidate fragmented “ayuda” programs under a single framework would benefit from drawing on existing evidence on the challenges of inter-agency coordination in the Philippines. A recent PIDS study found that institutional resistance, misaligned planning and budget cycles, incompatible data systems, and overlapping mandates across agencies are recurring barriers to effective joint programming, even where formal convergence mechanisms already exist (Albert, Genio, and Crismo, 2025). The IRR may wish to address these challenges directly by specifying how beneficiary data will be shared, how agency roles will be delineated, and how continuity of assistance to existing beneficiaries will be maintained throughout the transition.

The provision requiring that cash transfer amounts under the Pantawid Pag-Asa be based on PIDS recommendations is consistent with PIDS' existing mandate under RA 11310. However, it is important to clarify whether PIDS' role in conducting periodic assessments extends to the expanded scope of programs consolidated under the Pantawid Pag-Asa, and if so, whether the corresponding funding resources and data access arrangements are in place to support this broader responsibility.

6. Electric Utility Grants

S.B. No. 1496 proposes an electric utility grant of at least PHP 500 per year for each 4Ps household-beneficiary, channeled through the National Electrification Administration (NEA) and distributed via electric cooperatives. Research on existing electricity subsidy mechanisms in the Philippines finds that consumption-based eligibility criteria result in significant targeting inefficiencies, with benefits going to many non-poor households that fall below the consumption threshold (Francisco and Basilio, 2025; Francisco, 2024). By linking electricity support to verified welfare status through the existing 4Ps and Listahanan framework rather than to consumption levels, the proposed grant moves toward means-tested targeting that is more likely

to reach households that genuinely need assistance. The fixed-grant design also removes the incentive for households to manage their consumption to qualify for subsidies and results in more predictable fiscal costs.

We note, however, that the funding mechanism for the grant warrants attention. Francisco and Basilio (2025) caution that electricity subsidies financed through cross-subsidies on other consumers can reduce industrial competitiveness and create fiscal strain over time. The bill and the IRR may wish to explicitly confirm that the grant will be funded from general appropriations rather than passed on to other electricity consumers.

7. Grievance Redress System

The GRS provisions in S.B. No. 1487 draw on recommendations from PIDS Discussion Paper 2023-25 (Melad, 2024), which analyzed over 1.1 million complaints filed by 4Ps beneficiaries between 2014 and 2022. That study found that most complaints were related to delayed payments, system inefficiencies, and gaps in public awareness. The proposed provisions, including a GRS operations manual, capacity-building for grievance officers, use of customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and an annual client satisfaction report, are grounded in that analysis.

We recommend that the GRS provisions include a mandate for DSWD to publicly report on GRS performance, covering complaint resolution rates, average resolution time, and the share of complaints resolved in favor of beneficiaries. Reporting on these indicators is important for maintaining beneficiary trust and for identifying recurring problems in program delivery.

8. PhilSys Integration and the Social Protection Database

The use of the PhilSys Card Number (PCN) as the reference identifier across all social protection programs, as proposed in S.B. No. 31, is supported. Linking beneficiary records to a unique national ID reduces duplicate claiming, enables data sharing across agencies, and supports cross-program targeting. The proposed data sharing mechanism with DOH, DepEd, DA, DOLE, CHED, TESDA, and LGUs can improve the government's capacity to identify service delivery gaps and prevent fraud.

Effective implementation will require sufficient PhilSys registration coverage among the target population. S.B. No. 31 appropriately provides for alternative identification in cases where PhilSys IDs are unavailable, such as during disasters, and requires DSWD to integrate PCN data into its identification system. The IRR may wish to specify timelines and milestones for achieving full PCN integration and for setting up the inter-agency data sharing arrangements the bill envisions.

9. PIDS Mandate and Resource Requirements

Several of the bills propose changes that would expand the scope of PIDS's assessment and monitoring responsibilities. S.B. No. 1487 proposes shortening the review cycle for cash grant adequacy from every six years to annually, while S.B. No. 31 ties the grant amounts under the Pantawid Pag-Asa to PIDS recommendations and expands the range of programs subject to periodic assessment. These are appropriate provisions that strengthen the evidence basis for program design. However, fulfilling these responsibilities rigorously requires adequate institutional capacity, data access, and financial resources. We request that the proponents ensure that any legislative expansion of PIDS's mandate under the 4Ps is accompanied by sufficient budget appropriations and that PIDS is granted timely access to the administrative

data necessary to conduct credible and independent assessments

Conclusion

The four Senate Bills reviewed in this document address identified gaps in the 4Ps program across benefit adequacy, adult education, program duration, nutrition, program consolidation, accountability, and inter-agency coordination. The following summarizes the major recommendations of PIDS:

1. Grant increases are ideally systematic and based on inflation adjustments that restore the real value of grants, consistent with PIDS recommendations using the CPI for bottom 30 percent income households. Shortening the PIDS review cycle from every six years to annually is supported.
2. New conditionalities on adult education and livelihood are best introduced only after supply-side availability and local capacity are confirmed. Adult Education Program completions should ideally result in formally recognized credentials.
3. The retention extension for households still classified as poor is supported along with clear graduation criteria. For post-secondary coverage, prioritizing referral to existing programs such as the TES and tuition-free provisions in state universities and colleges is preferable to extending the 4Ps cash transfer.
4. The inclusion of undernourished children aged zero to six is supported but should be paired with strong health service monitoring and periodic review of the grant amount.
5. Consolidation under the Pantawid Pag-Asa would benefit from drawing existing evidence on inter-agency coordination challenges, with the IRR specifying data sharing arrangements, agency roles, and transition timelines.
6. The welfare-based targeting approach of the electric utility grant in S.B. No. 1496 is supported.
7. It is recommended that DSWD publicly report on GRS performance, including resolution rates, average resolution time, and the share of complaints resolved in favor of beneficiaries.
8. The use of the PhilSys Card Number as the universal identifier is supported, with the IRR specifying integration timelines and retaining provisions for alternative identification where needed.
9. Any legislative expansion of PIDS's mandate would need to be accompanied by sufficient budget appropriations and timely access to administrative data.

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