

Republic of the philippines

Sociology, Population



Republic of the Philippines HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Quezon City, Metro Manila FOURTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST REGULAR SESSION HOUSE BILL NO. 17 Introduced by HONORABLE EDCEL C. LAGMAN EXPLANATORY NOTE The present population of the country of 88.7 million has galloped from 60.7 million 17 years ago. This makes the Philippines the 12th most populous nation in the world today. The Filipino women's fertility rate of 3.05% is at the upper bracket of 206 countries. With four babies born every minute, the population is expected to balloon to an alarming 160 million in 2038. It is worth noting, however, that available studies, data and statistics show that the Filipinos are responsive to having smaller-sized families through free choice of family planning methods:

- a. The desired fertility rate of Filipino women is 2.5 children per woman. However, the actual total fertility rate is 3.5 or a difference of one child because of the lack of information and absence of access to family planning. The current unmet need for contraceptives for example is 23.15% for poor women and 13.6% for women who are not poor (2003 National Demographic and Health Survey)
- b. 61% of currently married women do not want additional children (2003 National Demographic and Health Survey)
- c. 50.6% of the youth want to have only two children (2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey)
- d. 97% of all Filipinos believe it is important to have the ability to control one's fertility or to plan one's family. It is significant to note that 87% of the total respondents are Roman Catholic (February 2004 Pulse Asia Survey)
- e. Nearly nine in ten Filipinos or 86% say that candidates for elective positions who advocate a program for women's health should be supported while only 2% say they should be rejected and 12% are undecided on the matter;
- f. 82%

say that candidates in favor of couples' free choice of family planning methods should be supported while only 3% think otherwise and 15% are undecided; g. 82% of Filipinos consider candidates supporting a law or measure on population issues worthy of their votes while only 3% say such candidates should not be backed at the polls and 15% are undecided; h. 83% of Filipinos say they are in favor of candidates who support the allocation of government funds for family planning while only 2% say they are not and 15% are undecided; and i. A mere 8% of Filipinos believe that a candidate's championing of family planning issues will spell that candidate's defeat at the polls. j. In July 1991, the Social Weather Stations conducted a survey that revealed that 97% of Filipinos want to have the ability to control their fertility and plan their families. Notwithstanding these findings that favor smaller-sized families, this bill is not a population control measure with the sole objective of limiting population growth. It provides for population development that aims to: (a) help couples/parents achieve their desired fertility size in the context of responsible parenthood; (b) improve reproductive health of individuals and contribute to decreased maternal mortality rate, infant mortality and early child mortality; (c) reduce incidence of teenage pregnancy and other reproductive health problems; and (d) contribute to policies that will assist government to achieve a favorable balance between population and distribution, economic activities and the environment. This measure is not coercive. It gives couples the freedom to decide whether or not to plan their families or space or limit their children. Those who decide to plan their families also have the freedom to choose what method of contraception is best suited for them. The so called " two

child policy" is voluntary, not compulsory; suggestive, not coercive; and absolutely not punitive. It is not even a policy. It is a suggested ideal or norm. Accordingly, this bill seeks to provide the enabling environment for couples and individuals to enjoy the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education, and access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice. This proposed law aims to uphold and promote the four pillars of population and development enunciated by no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself in her statement of support for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) namely: (1) responsible parenthood, (2) informed choice, (3) birth spacing, and (4) respect for life. It should be clarified, however, that this bill does not only protect the life of the unborn from the moment of implantation but that of the mother as well. Hence, the bill seeks to promote the reproductive health of women basically through massive and sustained information campaign on reproductive health rights, care, services and facilities coupled with universal access to all methods of family planning ranging from the natural to the modern which are medically safe and legally permissible. In the event they fail to prevent pregnancy and resort to abortion, they shall be provided with appropriate health and medical care. Despite the provision for humane and compassionate management of post abortion complications, this bill continues to proscribe and penalize abortion which is a crime under the Revised Penal Code. To contribute to the empowerment and responsible behavior of the youth, this proposed legislation provides for age-appropriate reproductive health and sexuality

education that may be initiated by parents at home, and shall be sustained and complemented by formal education in school. An effective reproductive health education does not only instill consciousness of freedom of choice but responsible exercise of one's rights. According to the United Nations Population Fund: " It has been, repeatedly shown that reproductive health education leads to responsible behavior, higher levels of abstinence, later initiation of sexuality, higher use of contraception, and fewer sexual partners, These good effects are even greater when parents can talk honestly with their children about sexual and reproductive matters. " To guarantee the right of all persons to a full range of information on family planning methods, services and facilities and to ensure their access to an equally full range of medically safe and effective family planning methods at an appropriate time and by competent and adequately trained persons, the bill mandates the Commission on Population (POPCOM) to be the central planning, coordinating, implementing and monitoring body for the comprehensive and integrated policy on reproductive health and population development. Section 5 of the bill specifies the functions of POPCOM as the lead agency in the implementation of the " Reproductive Health, Responsible Parenthood and Population Development Act of 2007" ³. This proposed Act does not only seek to protect and promote reproductive health and rights and to empower couples, individuals, more particularly women, and the youth, but it also aims to improve the quality of life of the people in general. Studies show that rapid population growth exacerbates poverty while poverty spawns rapid population growth. Consider the following: The Family Income and Expenditures Surveys by the National Statistics Office (NSO) from

1985-2000 disclose that 57.3% of families having many children are poor but only 15.7% of families having two children are poor. Large family size is associated with negative determinant of school participation and poor health and survival rates among children. (Orbeta, Population and the Fight Against Poverty, 2003) The prevalence of child labor rises, and school attendance falls, with the number of children in the family (Raymundo, 2004). Moreover, the odds of a child becoming underweight and stunted are greater if he/she belongs to a household with 5 or more members (FNRI 1998). This partly explains why poverty tends to be transmitted and sustained from one generation to the next. According to the UN Population Fund 2002 Report, "lower birth rates and slower population growth over the last three decades have contributed faster economic progress in a number of developing countries." Moreover, the same Report disclosed that fertility declines accounted for 1/5th of the economic growth in East Asia between 1960 and 1995. Additionally, it showed that countries that invest in health, including reproductive health and family planning, and in education and women's development register slower population growth and faster economic growth. A consistent and coherent national population policy along with sound monetary and fiscal policies and good governance could propel our people toward sustainable human development. Accordingly, approval of this measure is earnestly sought. (See also: Full text of House Bill No. 5043 (Reproductive Health and Population Development Act of 2008; poll also here)