

Abandoned children's needs are addressed

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PAMPANGA Rep. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has filed a bill seeking to strengthen, facilitate and simplify the adoption process of abandoned children.

In her House Bill 5090 or the Act Codifying the Alternative Child Care Laws of the Philippines, the former president said she wanted to address the worsening problem of neglected and “overage children” not fit for adoption.

Arroyo said her bill had moved to put all laws relating to the care of abandoned and neglected children into one law to streamline the proceedings undertaken to put them into adoption.

“The government has to step up its drive to solve the worsening problem of ‘unadoptable’ and overage children ‘not fit for adoption’ due to the long and complicated process of domestic and inter-country adoption,” Arroyo said.

“This bill seeks to address this problem by creating a ‘one-stop-shop code’ whereby those who seek to adopt and/or foster care will be easily facilitated to the best interest of every child available for adoption and/or foster care,” she added.

The United Nations Children’s Rights and Emergency Relief Organization data chalked up about 1.8-million abandoned children in the Philippines, Arroyo said.

To facilitate the adoption process, Arroyo’s bill provides for the creation of a National Child Care Authority which will be the sole authority to accept, evaluate and decide all applications for local and inter-country adoption.

“The establishment of NCCA, implementing the various alternative child care laws to be known as the ‘Alternative Child Care Code’ will not only improve and speed up the process of adoption, foster care and guardianship but will also increase its fiscal capacity thereby improving its services offered to stakeholders,” Arroyo said in the bill’s explanatory note.

Under the measure, the NCCA, to be headed by an executive director, shall have two divisions: The Domestic Child Care Division and Inter-Country Child Care Division.

Both divisions shall among others create and maintain a database of all children available for adoption as well as adoptive parents, facilitate matching and provide assistance to all stakeholders involved in adoption and foster care, the bill states.

Each division shall have a Child Placement Committee which will evaluate all applications for adoption.

Each committee is composed of a child psychiatrist or psychologist, a medical doctor, a lawyer, a registered social worker and a member of a non-government organization involved in alternative child care.

All certificates of adoption will be awarded to the adoptive parents within 30 days after the fulfillment of all requirements which include among others a case study by a social worker, publication and supervised trial custody.

All adoption proceedings shall be strictly confidential.

Arroyo’s HB 5090 also increases the age of children available for inter-country adoption to below 18 years of age from the present below 15 years of age.

It also decriminalizes simulated births as long as it was made for the best interest of the child and the child was treated favorably by the person who took him/her in.

Arroyo also wants to make foster care a mandatory program of the DSWD to protect the welfare of abandoned, abused and neglected children under the case of foster families prior to their adoption or return to their biological parents.

It also penalizes anyone who commits any misrepresentation in the adoption proceedings as well as subjecting the child to be adopted to danger, abuse or exploitation.

Arroyo said: "It is the policy of the State that every child remains under the care and custody of his/her parents and be provided with love, care, understanding and security towards the full and harmonious development of his/her personality.

"Only when such efforts prove insufficient and no appropriate placement or adoption within the child's extended family is available, shall adopted by an unrelated person be considered."