

## House Approves Absolute Divorce Bill Amid Intense Debate

In a significant legislative move, the House of Representatives, led by Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, passed House Bill 9349, known as the “Absolute Divorce Act,” on its third and final reading before the sine die adjournment. The bill garnered 131 affirmative votes, 109 negative votes, and 20 abstentions.

House Bill 9349 aims to offer absolute divorce as a legal remedy for irreparable marriages, focusing on reducing the emotional toll on children and allowing divorced individuals to remarry. The bill details comprehensive guidelines for filing divorce petitions, including grounds, procedures, and implications for custody, property division, and support. It also incorporates reconciliation methods, fines, and community-based initiatives managed by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

In addition to the divorce bill, the House advanced House Bill 10439, the “Access to Medical Cannabis Act,” to the second reading. Sponsored by Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers, this bill restricts medical cannabis access to prescriptions by accredited physicians and establishes a regulatory framework under the Department of Health (DOH) for cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, and prescription for medical and research purposes. Deputy Speaker Antonio Albano emphasized the importance of this legislation for patients with conditions like epilepsy and cancer, advocating for their right to choose their treatments.

Furthermore, the House approved House Bill 10466, the “Foreign Affairs Retirement Benefits Act,” on the second reading. Sponsored by Pangasinan Rep. Maria Rachel Arenas, the bill aims to provide retirement benefits to Foreign Affairs personnel.

These legislative actions mark significant steps in addressing complex social and medical issues in the Philippines.