

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 7640



Introduced by Hon. Julianne L. Baronda

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Since the pandemic, Filipino workers had to undergo abrupt changes in terms of workplace and work environment. We were forced to adapt immediately with the rapid changes in order to survive. Unfortunately, those who cannot ride this ravenous current either get left behind or worst, laid off from employment. Notwithstanding our laws protecting the workers, some of our *kababayan* experience insurmountable stress which forced them to give up their employment for the sake of their mental health.

In a 2019 study conducted by Hakulinen, people with mental health problems negatively impact their employment and their work performance.¹ Relatedly, in a survey conducted by mental health and well-being organization, MindNation, it was shown that due to the decline of mental health, some workers considered quitting their jobs in the hopes of addressing this problem.² Moreover, in a 2021 survey conducted by *Gallup*, the Philippines ranked 2nd in Southeast Asian Countries where workers experience daily sadness.

One of the causes of stress for Filipino workers is work. Based on a poll conducted by *Gallup*, the percentage of Filipino workers stating that they have experienced stress at work has consistently increased from 2019 up to 2021. In a survey conducted in 2022, 50% of Filipino workers said that they have experienced stress a lot than the previous day of work. Work-related stress is being addressed by the country, but unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the demand for such actions has never been so high and important. There are different avenues and programs which the government has explored to address this

1 Hakulinen, C., Elovainio, M., Arffman, M., Lumme, S., Pirkola, S., Keskimäki, I., et al. (2020). Employment status and personal income before and after onset of a severe mental disorder: a case-control study. *Psychiatric Serv.* 71:3. doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.201900239.ps.psychiatryonline.org

2 <https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2021/06/30/379391/mental-health-problems-weighting-on-phl-workforce-study-finds/>

issue, such as employee assistance programs. However, these programs have low usage rates and are not always accessible to Filipino workers. These programs are mostly designed to be reactive rather than proactive in addressing the mental health problems of Filipino workers which should not be the case.

In this regard, our beloved educators and professors are no exception to the negative impact of work-related stress. In a seminar conducted by the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC)* in January 2022 entitled “*Psychosocial and Mental Health Webinars for Teachers*”, it was shown that majority of educators have experienced burnout during the pandemic.³ It is without a doubt that teaching, even before the pandemic, has been fairly stressful and challenging. Now, more than ever, a teacher’s job has become even tougher, with longer hours of work, daily struggles to engage students remotely, repeated pivots from hybrid to remote to in-person classes, and not to mention the fears that they or their loved ones could get COVID.

It is without a doubt that the constant changes in teaching modality, environment, distant learning, and the impact of the pandemic to our Filipino students have been devastating. It is likewise clear that our teachers are at the forefront of providing emotional guidance and support for our students and for our nation. Hence, the burden to stay strong lies with our teachers, who are sometimes forced to disregard their personal struggles for the sake of our students. It is high time for us to recognize the daily sacrifices of our teachers and educators by providing them with additional support package and other benefits to address their mental health.

In view of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



Rep. Julianne “Jam” L. Baronda
District Representative

³ <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/philippines/2022/01/mental-health-concerns/story.html>

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AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH ALLOWANCE, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Kaantabay sa mga Guro Act*”.

Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to promote and improve the social and economic status of teachers, their living and working conditions, their terms of employment and likewise recognize their role in society and nation building. To this end, the State shall endeavor to take appropriate steps to increase consciousness among our teachers as to the importance of mental health and its effects, and provide them with the necessary benefits and allowances to safeguard their psychological and emotional well-being.

Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – For purposes of this Act, the following term is defined as follows:

- a. *Teachers* shall refer to all persons engaged in classroom teaching, in any level of instruction, on full-time basis, in all schools, colleges and universities operated by the Government or its political subdivisions.
- b. *Department* shall refer to the Department of Education.
- c. *Mental Health Allowance* shall refer to the allowance given by the government to public school teachers equivalent to half of the month’s salary of the teacher in addition to other compensations and benefits being received.

- d. Institution* shall refer to the educational institution where the teacher is exercising his/her professional function and employed under a regular contract.
- e. Mental Health Break* refers to the period given to public school teachers every semester where they are required to take a break from their usual work which shall consist of two (2) days with pay and attend self-development activities organized by the Institution.
- f. Self-development Activities* shall refer to extracurricular activities supervised, managed and funded by the institution for the benefit of the teachers during their mental health break conducted solely for the purpose of assisting in their personal development and spreading awareness regarding mental health.

Sec. 4. *Purposes and Objectives.* – The purposes and objectives of this Act are the following:

- (a) To provide support to teachers who are likely to experience mental health issues within and outside the workplace because of work-related stress;
 - (b) To spread mental health awareness, and its negative impact on both the personal and professional lives of teachers;
 - (c) To expand the mental health support system to teachers and students;
 - (d) To support and strengthen the current mental health programs of the Department;
- and,
- (e) To promote a healthy and conducive learning environment for the students by ensuring that teachers are mentally and emotionally fit for the position.

Sec. 5. *Mental Health Officer.* The benefits and privileges provided for in this act shall be supervised by the Mental Health Officer who shall be appointed by the Institution with the concurrence of the Department.

The Mental Health Officer shall exercise the following powers and functions:

- (a) Execute the guidelines, policies and programs approved by the Department and Institution pursuant to this act, and be responsible for the efficient discharge of operational functions;
- (b) Direct and supervise the distribution of the Mental Health allowance to every teacher qualified to receive such benefits;

- (c) Coordinate with the DepEd's Disaster Risk Reduction Management Services (DRRMS) and other Mental Health helpline system organized by the department to ensure the best approach to implement this policy, including its programs and guidelines;
- (d) Shall be the representative of the Department's Mental Health helpline system, and assist the teachers who are willing to avail of the Mental Health helpline program and refer them to the proper institutions or mental health facilities, if needed.
- (e) Submit a report at the end of every semester to the Department and the Institution regarding the implementation of this policy.

Sec. 6. *Mental Health Break.* The Institution shall provide for the specific period of the Mental Health Break for the Teachers which shall not be later than three (3) months from the start of every school semester. During the mental health break, the Institution is required to provide self-development activities for their teachers which shall focus on spreading awareness and consciousness on mental health. The mental health break shall consist of two (2) consecutive days with pay where the teachers will be required to attend self-development activities for every semester. In no case shall the mental health break be used for more than two (2) semesters.

Sec. 7. *Mental Health Allowance.* This shall be given to qualified teachers under this Act every 30th of the month of May every school year. The amount is equivalent to half of the month's salary of the teacher which shall be exempt from tax and other forms of deductions.

Sec. 8. *Commencement of Implementation.* – The provisions of this act shall be implemented at the start of the school's first semester following the effectivity of this act, and shall continue to be effective until a new law is passed.

Sec. 9. *Tax Exemptions and Privileges.* – All existing tax exemptions and privileges extended to teachers shall be applicable to the allowance and benefits provided under this Act.

Sec. 10. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be charged against those authorized in the current appropriations of the DepEd. Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the budget of the DepEd in the annual General Appropriations Act...

Sec. 11. *Periodic Review.* As the need arises or within five (5) years after its effectivity, the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee shall conduct a review of this Act for purposes of determining whether remedial legislation is in order.

Sec. 12. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* The Department of Education, in coordination with the Institutions, shall promulgate rules and regulations implementing the provisions of this Act within sixty (60) days from its effectivity.

Sec. 13. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or otherwise invalid, the validity of the other provisions shall not be affected thereby.

Sec. 14. *Repealing Clause.* – All other laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations, other issuances, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Sec. 15. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.