

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 8061



Introduced by Hon. Julianne L. Baronda

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Mental Health among Filipinos has been suffering a significant decline since the pandemic, and is now a cause of concern in the country. The catastrophes, climate change, economic inflations, global pandemic, the threat of a large-scale war, and other global crises occurring within a short span of time have caused people around the world great anxiety and distress. In a 2022 study conducted by Hechanova, et al., at the De La Salle University, it was found out that the mental health of various sectors in the country has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Younger generations experience great distress, while the older generations to a lesser degree also experience distress and anxiety.¹ Also in a 2022 global survey, it was found out that the Philippines has the highest number of young people experiencing high levels of anxiety and negative emotions associated with the climate crisis.²

Relatedly, not even the country's Armed Forces are exempt from these circumstances. As a matter of fact, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has been in the frontlines of every major catastrophe in the country. The war against rebels and extremist, the growing tensions between different countries involving territorial disputes and maritime claims, the war on drugs, the pandemic, and the looming threat of a large-scale war have always been the major concerns that our armed forces have to face on a daily basis which may adversely affect their mental health, and test their mental fortitude. The continuous exposure of our military personnel, whether in combat or otherwise, takes a toll on their mental health and well-being. In a study conducted in 2010, one out of every four soldiers has high levels of combat-related stress.³

The effects to the mental health and well-being of our troops by these different factors require much attention, otherwise, the same could result to dire consequences. In response, the government has increased its efforts to address the desperate need for mental health care amongst military personnel by instituting programs to help our troops including but not limited to the V. Luna AFP Medical Center in

¹ <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/pdf/research/journals/apssr/2022-March-vol22-1/12-age-covid-19-and-mental-health-in-the-philippines-a-multidimensional-perspective>

² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bjpsych-international/article/climate-change-and-mental-health-in-the-philippines/2C38EEC4ACC529448C359951B028B1CE>

³ Ilagan 2010

Quezon City and the “Musta ka Tropa Program” initiated by the Camp Panacan Hospital in Eastern Mindanao centered on assessing the mental health of soldiers. This notwithstanding, it is clear that mental health problem among our troops still requires a far more comprehensive approach.

Our Armed Forces need our help against an enemy which they are not properly trained nor fully equipped to face. An enemy that lingers and strikes at any time, and when our troops are at their most vulnerable state. A battle that our troops cannot win alone, and the casualties are far reaching that it extends beyond the confines of their barracks. When our troops need assistance, protection, and support, it is up to the people, the public, which they have vowed and sworn to protect to do the same for them.

Considering these asseverations, the approval of this bill is earnestly sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JL Baronda', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rep. Julianne “Jam” L. Baronda
District Representative

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HOUSE BILL NO. 8061

Introduced by Hon. Julianne L. Baronda

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, A MENTAL HEALTH CARE PACKAGE, 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 “KAAGAPAY ACT”.

Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy* – It is the policy of the State to promote and upkeep the mental health of our military personnel in the Armed Forces of the Philippines that plays a vital role as one of the pillars of our nation and society. To this end, the State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to mental health development by providing them specialized mental health services and benefits which shall be available and accessible to all our military personnel.

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

- a. *Troops* shall refer to all military personnel in the Armed Forces of the Philippines;
- b. *PTSD* refers to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder suffered by military personnel during and after service;
- c. *Care Package* refers to monetary benefits extended by the government to military personnel solely to assist them in rearing their mental health;
- d. *Stigma* refers to the mindset among group of people involving mental health;
- e. *Department* refers to the Department of Health;
- f. *Mental Health Officer* is the duly appointed Mental Health professional by the Department on every barracks or stations of the AFP within the country;

- g. *Mental Health Facilities* refer to Mental Health clinics established in each designated barracks or stations of the AFP;
- h. *Mental Health Professional* is a duly appointed registered and licensed psychiatrist who is authorized to perform counseling and therapy for every barracks or stations of the AFP as determined by the Mental Health Officer; and,
- i. *Mental Health Consultation* refers to a therapy whereby the appointed mental health professional in each barracks will conduct counseling and therapy sessions with a member of the troops within or without the clinic in pursuant to the provisions herein or as needed.

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

- (a) To provide support to our troops who are experiencing Mental Health problems within and outside of service due to combat-related stress and other factors;
- (b) To spread mental health awareness, and its negative impact on our troops, and their families and peers;
- (c) To expand the Mental Health support system among our troops and their families;
- (d) To support the current Mental Health programs of the government for our troops;
- (e) To ensure that our troops are well-equipped in dealing with their mental stress and anxieties while in the service and thereafter;
- (f) To promote an environment where facilities and services for dealing with mental health problems are readily available; and,
- (g) To eradicate the stigma among troops and their family members in dealing with mental health problems.

Sec. 5. 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 its operational functions;
- (b) Direct and supervise the distribution of the Mental Health allowance to our troops qualified to receive such benefits;
- (c) Coordinate with the Mental Health facilities and other Mental Health helpline system organized by the department to ensure the best approach to implement this policy, its programs and guidelines;
- (d) In charge of managing the Mental Health Facilities and its implements, and ensure its availability to any troops who are in need of such services;
- (e) Shall be the representative of the Department's Mental Health helpline system, and shall assist the troops who are willing to avail of the Mental Health helpline program, to refer them to the proper institutions or mental health facilities, if needed;
- (f) Submit a report at the end of every month of December or earlier if necessary to the Department regarding the results of the Mental Health Consultations conducted, and the implementation of this policy and its programs.

Sec. 6. *Care Package*. This shall be given to every active member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines qualified under this Act at the end of the month of May each year. The amount is equivalent to half of the month's salary of the troops which shall be exempt from tax and other forms of deductions. Only those members of the AFP who were able to successfully comply with the Mandatory Mental Health Consultation within the same year may be qualified to avail of this benefit.

Sec. 7. *Mandatory Mental Health Consultation*. It shall be mandated that every active member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines shall undergo a mandatory mental health consultation with a mental health professional designated in their respective barracks or stations every month of April, August, and December of the same year while on active duty or service.

Sec. 8. *Period of Implementation*. – This act shall take effect immediately and shall continue to be effective until the Congress decides to discontinue it through a legislative act.

Sec. 9. *Tax Exemptions and Privileges*. – All existing tax exemptions and privileges extended to troops on their current bonuses and allowances 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 from the National Budget, Thereafter, the amount necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the budget of the AFP 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 AFP, in coordination with the Department, 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.