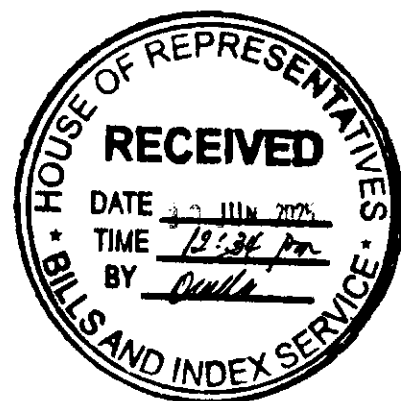


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 163



Introduced by: HON. VINCENZO RENATO LUIGI VILLAFUERTE

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In recent years, the mental health of young Filipinos has emerged as a critical public health issue, amplified by academic pressures, the psychological aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pervasive influence of digital technologies. Increasing rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation among students have been documented in multiple studies and echoed by educators and healthcare professionals nationwide. At the same time, the rise of social media and digital platforms has introduced new and poorly regulated risks ranging from addictive design and algorithmic manipulation to cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content that directly affect the psychological well-being of children and adolescents.

While the Philippine Mental Health Act of 2018 (Republic Act No. 11036) affirms the right of all Filipinos to mental health care and mandates the provision of services in educational institutions, its implementation remains uneven and underfunded, especially at the basic education level. Many public schools still lack access to trained mental health professionals, and the majority of students have no regular channel for counseling, early intervention, or emotional support. Moreover, the regulatory framework to safeguard young Filipinos in the digital environment remains limited, despite growing evidence that certain digital design choices can significantly exacerbate mental health challenges.

This proposed measure, the “Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing for Youth Act of 2025,” builds on the intent of R.A. 11036 and the constitutional directive under Article II, Section 13 of the 1987 Constitution to promote and protect the physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being of the youth. It seeks to institutionalize comprehensive school-based mental health care and establish a national response to the emerging risks posed by unregulated digital environments.

The bill proposes the deployment of licensed mental health professionals such as psychologists, guidance counselors, or psychiatric nurses to every public high school and state university within three years, in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Education (DepEd), and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). It also mandates annual mental health screenings, the establishment of safe spaces for emotional processing, and training programs for teachers in trauma-informed and empathy-based approaches.

These initiatives are aligned with the DOH’s mandate to lead the development of a national mental health strategy under R.A. 11036 and to promote a holistic approach to adolescent well-being. By integrating the mental health responsibilities of the DOH with

responsive education policy and forward-looking digital regulation, this measure delivers a systemic and rights-based approach to protecting the mental and emotional health of Filipino students. It recognizes that youth mental health is both a public health and human development priority, one that demands sustained investment, cross-sectoral coordination, and compassionate policy design.

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



HON. VINCENZO RENATO LUIGI VILLAFUERTE
District 2, Camarines Sur

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House Bill No. 163

Introduced by: HON. VINCENZO RENATO LUIGI VILLAFUERTE

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND DIGITAL WELLBEING PROGRAM, PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN SCHOOLS, REGULATING HARMFUL DIGITAL PRACTICES, AND STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION FOR FILIPINO STUDENTS

Section 1. This Act shall be known as the “Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing for Youth Act of 2025.”

Section 2. It is the policy of the State to protect the mental, emotional, and psychological health of the Filipino youth. Recognizing the rising incidence of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and digital addiction among students, the State shall institutionalize responsive, school-based mental health services and regulate the harmful effects of digital platforms on the well-being of minors.

Section 3. This Act aims to:

- a. Ensure access to early, preventive, and non-stigmatizing mental health support in all public schools and State Universities and Colleges (SUCs);
- b. Deploy trained mental health professionals to educational institutions nationwide;
- c. Regulate youth-targeted digital platforms to prevent algorithmic harm and addictive design;
- d. Promote digital literacy and emotional resilience among students;
- e. Create a nationwide platform for youth mental health support through technology.

Section 4. The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall implement comprehensive mental health services in all public secondary schools and SUCs, including:

- a. Deployment of at least one licensed mental health professional (psychologist, guidance counselor, or psychiatric nurse) per public high school and university campus within three (3) years from the effectivity of this Act;
- b. Annual mental health screenings and wellness mapping for students; and creation of safe spaces for counseling, peer support, and emotional processing;
- c. Confidential and non-punitive referral system for at-risk students;
- d. Training programs for teachers on mental health first aid, trauma-informed approaches, and empathy-based discipline.

Section 5. All schools shall observe an annual “Digital Detox Week,” a week-long series of activities promoting offline connections, creative expression, nature engagement, and digital self-regulation.

DepEd and CHED shall integrate Digital Detox Week into the official school calendar starting School Year 2026–2027.

Section 6. DepEd, CHED, and the Department of Health (DOH) shall publish an annual report on Youth Mental Health and Digital Behavior, covering:

- a. Trends in depression, anxiety, digital usage, and suicide risk among students;
- b. Regional disparities and emerging mental health issues;
- c. Policy recommendations and accountability of digital platforms.

Section 7. The necessary funds for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA). The DepEd, CHED, DOH, and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) shall coordinate to ensure adequate and timely release of funds. Local government units (LGUs) may also allocate funds to support this Act within their jurisdiction.

Section 8. Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, and DICT shall convene a Joint Task Force to draft the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

Section 9. If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 10. All laws, executive orders, issuances, and rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 11. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,