

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 726



Introduced by Representative Antolin A. Oreta III

AN ACT
STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OF STATE UNIVERSITIES AND
COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

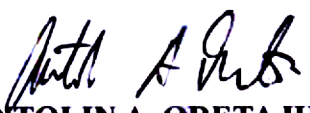
Section 13, Article II of the 1987 Constitution provides that “the State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being.” Republic Act No. 11036, or the “Mental Health Act,” further affirms the right of every Filipino to mental health services and directs the State to develop policies and programs that promote mental health and wellness.

While the Mental Health Act encourages the integration of mental health services in schools, many State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) lack the institutional support, personnel, and programs necessary to address the needs of their students, faculty, and personnel. The absence of dedicated Mental Health Offices and qualified mental health professionals limits their ability to provide proper and adequate mental health services.

This bill seeks to institutionalize accessible and inclusive mental health services across all SUCs through, among others, the establishment of Mental Health Offices in every campus and the hiring, training, and deployment of dedicated SUC-based mental health service personnel responsible for developing programs and providing services that assist students in resolving emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial issues. This measure intends to promote early intervention, reduce stigma, and create safe and supportive learning environments conducive to academic and personal growth.

This bill was approved by the House of Representatives in the 19th Congress and was duly transmitted to the Senate. This is refiled in the 20th Congress under the same considerations for which it was previously approved.

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


REP. ANTOLIN A. ORETA III
Lone District of Malabon City

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

1 **SECTION 1. *Short Title.*** – This Act shall be known as the “*State Universities and Colleges*
2 *(SUCs) Mental Health Service Act*”.

3
4 **SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.*** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to uphold the basic
5 right of every Filipino to sound mental health and ensure access to appropriate interventions, therapy,
6 and treatment as needed. Pursuant to this mandate, the State shall institute policies to promote the mental
7 health and wellness of students, faculty, teaching and non-teaching staff, and other personnel in the
8 campuses of SUCs through, among others, the establishment of a Mental Health Office in all SUCs, and
9 the hiring, deployment, and training of additional SUCs-based mental health service personnel.

10
11 All SUCs shall ensure that proper and adequate mental health services are provided to their
12 students, faculty, non-teaching staff and other personnel. In this regard, all SUCs, through their Mental
13 Health Offices, shall design programs and provide services that shall assist students in resolving
14 emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial issues that are barriers to learning and enhance the preparedness
15 of the faculty, teaching, non-teaching staff, and other personnel to foster an enabling environment for
16 students to acquire knowledge and to develop intellectually.

17
18 **SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.*** - As used in this Act:

19
20 a) *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or certification granted by
21 the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at the minimum a master’s degree in Guidance
22 and Counseling, Guidance, or Counseling, without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather’s
23 clause of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”, and
24 is competent to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance and implement mental health
25 programs;

26
27 b) *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one’s own abilities
28 and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme
29 life events, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution to the

community;

c) *Mental health professional* refers to a medical doctor, nurse, guidance counselor, psychologist, or any other appropriately-trained and qualified person with specific skills relevant to, and necessary for, the provision of mental health services;

d) *Mental health services* refer to the psychosocial, psychiatric, or neurologic activities and programs along the whole range of the mental health support services including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are provided by mental health facilities and mental health professionals;

e) *Psychologist* refers to a natural person who has professional training and clinical skills in psychotherapeutic intervention and assessment for mental health problems and possesses a license or certification granted by the PRC and holds at the minimum a master's degree in Psychology without prejudice to those granted licenses under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 10029, otherwise known as the "Philippine Psychology Act of 2009";

f) *SUCs-based mental health service personnel* refers to any mental health professional who is hired or deployed by, or has a contract with an SUC to render mental health services in its campus.

SEC. 4. Establishment of Mental Health Offices in All SUCs Campuses. – The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall, subject to the rules and regulations of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the policies, standards, and guidelines of the CHED, require all SUCs to establish a Mental Health Office in all their campuses.

The Mental Health Offices shall set up campus hotlines with dedicated and trained guidance counselors to provide assistance to the whole SUC Community, especially the students. Special attention shall be given to those identified to have mental health problems or conditions, especially those at risk of committing suicide.

The CHED and the SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the collective consciousness about mental health. The awareness campaign shall give special emphasis to the issues of suicide prevention, stress handling, mental health and nutrition, and guidance and counseling. The campaign shall ensure that the whole SUC community, especially the students, is aware of in-campus mental health services.

The SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall implement mental health programs and projects designed to promote the mental health and well-being of faculty, students, and personnel alike.

Each Mental Health Office shall be manned by trained mental health professionals who shall serve as the mental health service personnel of the SUCs.

The SUCs-based mental health service personnel of the Mental Health Offices, including those who shall be hired upon the effectivity of this Act, shall create a mechanism for timely crisis intervention and suicide prevention and the appropriate response strategies for the whole SUCs community, especially the students.

The CHED shall, in coordination with the SUCs, establish mechanisms to maximize existing services offered by other executive departments such as the attached agencies to the Department of Health (DOH) dealing with mental health and the Department of Social Welfare and Development

1
2 e) Review, revise and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health professionals in
3 accordance with laws governing their professions;
4

5 f) Prepare a performance evaluation plan that considers the improvement of the efficiency and
6 organizational effectiveness of each counselor: *Provided*, That each employee shall be informed regularly
7 by their immediate supervisor of the evaluation of their performance; and,
8

9 g) Provide periodic training, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of mental health
10 professionals.
11

12 **SEC. 7. *Salary Scale.*** - The career and salary scales of mental health professionals in SUCs shall
13 provide for a gradual progression from a minimum to a maximum salary by means of regular increments,
14 to be given regularly based on merit and competencies.
15

16 The entry level of mental health professionals shall not be lower than Salary Grade 16. Mental health
17 professionals hired by SUCs as Psychometricians shall be hired at Salary Grade 11 at the entry level.
18

19 **SEC. 8. *Contractual Hiring of Mental Health Personnel.*** - In case of a scarcity of mental health
20 professionals who are available to work on a full-time basis in a Mental Health Office, the concerned
21 SUC may hire qualified professionals on a contractual or part-time basis, subject to the evaluation and
22 approval of the DBM.
23

24 **SEC. 9. *Benefits.*** - All mental health professionals employed in the various Mental Health Offices
25 shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and other benefits provided in Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known
26 as the "Magna Carta of Public Health Workers", Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the
27 "Mental Health Act", and other pertinent laws.
28

29 **SEC. 10. *Appropriations.*** - The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be
30 included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.
31

32 **SEC. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** - Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this
33 Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the Philippine Association of State Universities and
34 Colleges, and other concerned stakeholders, issue rules and regulations to govern the hiring, training and
35 deployment of guidance counselors, psychologists and other mental health service personnel in SUCs,
36 and for the implementation of this Act.
37

38 **SEC. 12. *Suppletory Application.*** - The applicable provisions of Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise
39 known as the "Mental Health Act", insofar as they are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act,
40 shall apply suppletorily.
41

42 **SEC. 13. *Separability Clause.*** - If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the
43 remainder of this Act or any provision not affected, shall remain in full force and effect.
44

45 **SEC. 14. *Repealing Clause.*** - Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of
46 instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this
47 Act is repealed, modified or amended accordingly.
48

49 **SEC. 15. *Effectivity.*** - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official*

- 1 *Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.
- 2
- 3 *Approved,*