

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1256



Introduced by **REP. MARCELINO R. TEODORO**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

1 The issue of mental illness in the Philippines gains attention from the State and
2 is supported by the passage of Republic Act No. 11036, or the Mental Health Act, in
3 2018. This law secures the rights and welfare of persons with mental health needs
4 and mental health professionals, provides mental health services down to the
5 barangays, and integrates psychiatric, psychosocial, and neurologic services in
6 regional, provincial, and tertiary hospitals. It also mandates improving the country's
7 mental health care facilities and promoting mental health education in schools and
8 workplaces.

9 Unfortunately, in spite of this law's passage, mental health amongst the youth
10 is surging especially since the onset of technology and smart phones. The youth today
11 is under the impression of conforming to certain standards and expectations that are
12 somewhat sometimes unreasonable and even unachievable just because of what they
13 see on social media, on the news, and on other platforms. These expectations stress
14 an individual and one finds it difficult to cope with.

15 Furthermore, the gravity of mental health problems in the country remains.
16 President Ferdinand Marcos' State of the Nation Address (SONA) last July 2024
17 recognized mental illness as one of the "pressing yet delicate social issues of the day."
18 Over 3.6 million Filipinos, as reported by the DOH, suffered from mental, neurological,
19 or substance use disorders as of 2023. The Philippine Mental Health Association even
20 warned that access to mental health services in the country remained limited or
21 inaccessible due to stigma and scarce resources. The Philippines has 1,821 mental
22 health professionals nationwide: over 240 psychiatrists, 842 mental health nurses, 82
23 psychologists, 521 social workers, and 136 other specialized mental health workers
24 (*WHO Mental Health Atlas 2020*). Hence, there was less than one mental health
25 worker available for every 100,000 Filipinos.

1 Meanwhile, there is a need to address global suicide mortality rate and promote
2 and prioritize mental health and well-being The World Health Organization (WHO)
3 reported that over 720,000 people around the world die from suicide annually, around
4 73 percent of global suicides occurred in low and middle-income countries. and that
5 suicide was the third leading cause of death among those aged 15 to 29 in 2021.

6 In the Philippines, a spike in suicide and self-harm statistics was observed in
7 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from the Philippine Statistics
8 Authority (PSA) released in 2021, deaths due to intentional self-harm hit around 4,420
9 in 2020, an increase of over 57.3 percent from 2019. It became the 25th leading cause
10 of death for that year.

11 In 2022, the University of the Philippines Population Institute released the 2021
12 Youth Adult Fertility Surveys showing that nearly 1 in 5 Filipino youth aged between
13 15-24 had suicidal thoughts. Scientifically, the stage between 15 to 24 years old is the
14 peak of one's childhood in terms of physical, social, and psychological developments,
15 yet it is likewise the stage where a child experiences the onset of mental illness. It is
16 during this time that they need more attention and care, otherwise, their mental health
17 will greatly affect their physical, social, and psychological health.

18 In 2023, the Department of Health (DOH) reported over 95 deaths caused by
19 suicide in Eastern Visayas alone, a sharp increase from the 49 in 2022. The Philippine
20 National Police also recorded in the same year that one in 10 students in the country
21 had seriously attempted to commit suicide.

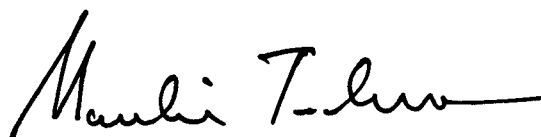
22 To help promote suicide prevention, the DOH released a memorandum in
23 March 2022 which stipulates guidelines for "the ethical and responsible reporting of
24 suicide in the news and broadcast media, and portrayal in films, stage, and television,"
25 given the reported association between risk of suicide and its portrayal in media. To
26 further reinforce this effort and those provided by RA 11036, this proposed measure
27 seeks to promote and ensure mental health services in state universities and colleges
28 (SUCs) that attend to their personnel and students' mental, developmental, and
29 emotional needs. This bill grants mental health professionals enhanced benefits and
30 career development to incentivize them to join the SUCs.

31 The Department of Education (DepEd) has shared that in the School Year
32 2023-2024, more than 1,700 students committed attempted suicide and 254 students
33 committed suicide. Of that number, 113 were junior high students while 61 were senior
34 high students. Education Undersecretary Wilfredo Cabral said that one of the
35 contributing factors to this were "*influence of social media, problems in the family, and*
36 *abuse, among others*".¹ This concern also became one of the reasons for the passage
37 of Republic Act No. 12080 or the "Basic Education Mental Health and Well-being

¹ <https://malaya.com.ph/news/national-news/why-are-pinoy-students-committing-suicide/>

1 Promotion Act” in 2024 to strengthen mental health programs in educational
2 institutions wherein students spend most of their time, aside from their homes.

3 In view of the foregoing, immediate approval of this measure is earnestly
4 sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marcelino R. Teodoro', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARCELINO R. TEODORO

Representative

First District, Marikina City

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session
1256
HOUSE BILL NO. _____

Introduced by **REP. MARCELINO R. TEODORO**

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

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 “**State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) Mental Health Service Act**”.

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

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

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

- 17
18 a) *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or certification
19 granted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at the
minimum a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling, Guidance, or

Counseling, without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", and is competent to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance and implement mental health programs;

b) *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one's own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme 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

1 campaign shall ensure that the whole SUC community, especially the students, is
2 aware of in-campus mental health services.

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

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

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

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

16 **SEC. 5. Hiring, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals. -**

17 Subject to the guidelines set by the CHED and the SUCs, CSC and DBM, the SUCs
18 shall hire, train and deploy mental health professionals, including a psychologist, to
19 the Mental Health Office to ensure that each SUC shall have mental health
20 professionals or mental health service providers within five (5) years from the
21 effectivity of this Act.

22 The SUCs shall, in coordination with the CHED, prepare the appropriate plantilla
23 positions to be submitted to the DBM for evaluation and approval for the additional
24 SUC-based mental health service personnel to be hired under this Act, subject to the
25 existing organizational, staffing, position classification and compensation policies,
26 rules, and regulations.

27 Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the
28 "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", SUCs may hire, as may be necessary,
29 college graduates who do not yet qualify as mental health professionals but who
30 possess a background in psychology or similar fields to provide mental health
31 services: *Provided*, That the CHED shall provide for the appropriate training and
32 instruction of such college graduates in order for them to gain and develop the
33 necessary skills to render counselling services to faculty, students and school
34 personnel, and assist them in managing mental health issues: *Provided, further*, That
35 such services shall be rendered under the supervision of qualified mental health
36 professionals within the schools division: *Provided, finally*, That a college graduate
37 hired to work in a Mental Health Office shall, within three (3) years from the date of
38 employment in the SUC, secure the appropriate license to practice as a mental health
39 professional and meet the relevant qualification requirements of their position.

1 The CHED and the SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall formulate a scheme
2 for the continuous training of mental health service personnel, taking into consideration
3 the latest scientific studies, psycho-social approaches and know-how on mental health
4 and mental health services, in accordance with the provisions of Republic Act No.
5 10912, otherwise known as the "Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016".

6 **SEC. 6. Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals. -**

7 The CHED shall, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH and the PRC:

8
9 a) Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that shall include
10 provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, in-
11 service training, graduate scholarships, research grants, and incentive award
12 system;

13 b) Match the salary grades of mental health professionals with related plantilla
14 items under the provisions of Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the
15 "Compensation and Position Classification Act of 1989," as amended;

16 c) Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental
17 Health Professionals to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10968, otherwise
18 known as the "Philippine Qualifications Framework Act";

19 d) Revisit the organizational structure of the SUCs to provide competent and
20 professional personnel who shall provide supervision and technical assistance to
21 the guidance counselors;

22 e) Review, revise and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health
23 professionals in accordance with laws governing their professions;

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

28 g) Provide periodic training, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of mental
29 health professionals.

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

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

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

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

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

12 **SEC. 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations.** – Within sixty (60) days from the
13 effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the Philippine
14 Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other concerned stakeholders,
15 issue rules and regulations to govern the hiring, training and deployment of guidance
16 counselors, psychologists and other mental health service personnel in SUCs, and for
17 the implementation of this Act.

18 **SEC. 12. Suppletory Application.** - The applicable provisions of Republic Act No.
19 11036, otherwise known as the "Mental Health Act", insofar as they are not
20 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, shall apply suppletorily.

21 **SEC. 13. Separability Clause.** – If any provision of this Act is declared
22 unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected, shall remain
23 in full force and effect.

24 **SEC. 14. Repealing Clause.** – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive
25 order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or
26 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is repealed, modified or amended
27 accordingly.

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

30 *Approved,*