

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1700



Introduced by **HON. MIGUEL LUIS R. VILLAFUERTE**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

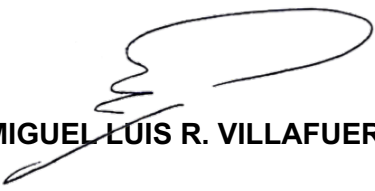
Article II, Section 15 of the 1987 Constitution declares that “the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them.” This constitutional mandate includes the responsibility to safeguard the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the Filipino youth, especially in light of increasing rates of depression and anxiety, exacerbated by digital technology.

A 2022 UNICEF Philippines report highlighted that more than 30% of Filipino adolescents have experienced online harassment or cyberbullying, while excessive screen time, algorithm-driven content, and addictive design features have been linked to sleep disruption, emotional dysregulation, and lowered academic performance.¹ Unfortunately, despite the scale of these issues, many public schools still lack licensed mental health professionals and structured early intervention programs.

This measure is aligned with the Republic Act No. 11036 or the “National Mental Health Act” which calls for the provision of mental health services at the community and school levels. In addition, it expands on the mandate of Republic Act No. 12080, or the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act by providing mandatory deployment of licensed mental health professionals in all public high schools and State Universities and Colleges, the annual mental health screenings and wellness profiling of students as preventive care, and the creation of safe, stigma-free spaces for emotional support and referral.

It also introduces a digital wellbeing component to address the growing mental health risks associated with excessive and unregulated use of digital platforms and an annual “Digital Detox Week” in schools which is a creative and non-punitive way to promote offline social connection.

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


HON. MIGUEL LUIS R. VILLAFUERTE

¹ UNICEF Philippines. (2022). *Safer Children in a Digital World: A Philippine Agenda for Action to Protect Children Online*.
<https://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/safer-children-digital-world>

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AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING 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, 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 “Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing for Youth Act.”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – 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. *Objectives.* – This Act seeks to:

- (a) Ensure access to early, preventive, and non-stigmatizing mental health support in all public secondary 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; and
- (e) Create a nationwide platform for youth mental health support through technology.

SECTION 4. *School-based Mental Health Services.* – 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 (e.g. psychologist, guidance counselor, or psychiatric nurse) per high school and university campus within three (3) years from the effectivity of this Act;
- (b) Annual mental health screenings and wellness profiling for students;
- (c) Creation of safe spaces for counseling, peer support, and emotional processing;
- (d) Implementation of a confidential and non-punitive referral system for at-risk students;
- (e) Mandatory training programs for teachers and staff on mental health first aid, trauma-informed approaches, and empathy-based discipline.

SECTION 5. *Digital Detox Week.* – 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 immediately succeeding official school calendar after the effectivity of this Act.

SECTION 6. *Report on Youth Mental Health and Digital Behavior.* – 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; and
- (c) Policy recommendations and accountability measures for digital platforms.

SECTION 7. *Appropriations.* – 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. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – 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. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining parts or provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 10. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, issuances, and rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

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

Approved,