

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City
TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session
House Bill No. 2190



Introduced by Representative

BRIAN DANIEL POE LLAMANZARES, PhD, MNSA

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE E-GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PROGRAM AND THE MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIZATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE, PROVIDING FOR STRONGER SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In recent years, the Philippines has seen a growing mental health crisis among its youth, driven by a complex mix of social pressures, academic demands, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pervasive influence of the digital world. Despite the passage of the Mental Health Act of 2018, gaps remain in the availability, accessibility, and affordability of mental health support for young people, particularly in underserved and remote communities.

This proposed measure recognizes that the right to mental health is fundamental and that our young people deserve safe, confidential, and easily accessible pathways to seek help and build resilience. However, the severe shortage of trained mental health professionals and the stigma still attached to seeking mental health support continue to hinder many young Filipinos from getting the care they need.

To bridge this gap, this measure establishes two practical, complementary solutions: the E-Guidance Counselor Program (EGCP) and the Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program (MHSSP).

The EGCP will make confidential, youth-friendly counseling and mental health support available through secure digital platforms. This approach not only addresses the barriers posed by physical distance and lack of local services but also aligns with the communication preferences and realities of today's digital-native generation. It includes clear standards for data privacy, ethical practice, emergency referrals, and grievance mechanisms, ensuring that help is both accessible and trustworthy.

Alongside this, the MHSSP will build a robust pipeline of qualified mental health professionals by providing scholarships for students pursuing degrees in psychology, psychiatry, psychiatric nursing, counseling, social work, and related fields. In exchange, scholars will fulfill a mandatory public service commitment in government agencies, schools, community centers, or within the EGCP itself. This ensures that public investment in education directly benefits the nation by addressing the chronic shortage of mental health workers where they are needed most.

This bill also strengthens inter-agency coordination through a Joint Coordinating Council and leverages local government units to raise awareness and ensure that even the most remote youth have physical access points—such as barangay centers and school facilities—to connect with digital mental health services. Funding provisions include the necessary ICT upgrades, recognizing that digital equity is key to successful implementation.

Through this measure, the State commits to turning mental health support from a privilege into a reality for all young Filipinos—protecting their well-being today and empowering them to become resilient, productive citizens tomorrow.

In view of the urgent need to address the mental health crisis among our youth and build a future-ready, caring society, the immediate passage of this measure is earnestly sought.

Approval of this bill is most respectfully urged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brian Poe", with a stylized, flowing script.

HON. BRIAN DANIEL POE LLAMANZARES, PhD, MNSA
Representative
FPJ Panday Bayanihan Party-List

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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 “Youth Mental Health Support Act.”

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. The State recognizes the fundamental right of every Filipino, especially the youth, to mental health and well-being. It is hereby declared the policy of the State to prioritize the mental health of young people, acknowledging the growing mental health crisis exacerbated by various societal pressures, digital influences, and limited access to professional support. The State commits to providing accessible, confidential, and effective mental health services through innovative digital platforms and to building a robust pool of qualified mental health professionals dedicated to public service. This Act aims to address the current shortage of mental health practitioners and ensure that mental health support is readily available to all young Filipinos.

Section 3. Definition of Terms. For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

(A) **Young People or Youth** refers to individuals aged fifteen (15) to thirty (30) years old, as defined by Republic Act No. 8044, also known as the “Youth in Nation-Building Act,” and other

relevant laws, but may also include children below fifteen (15) years old as deemed appropriate by the Implementing Rules and Regulations.

(B) **E-Guidance Counselor Program (EGCP)** refers to a government-financed initiative providing online and tele-mental health support services, including counseling, psychological first aid, and referrals, to young people through digital platforms.

(C) **Mental Health Professional** refers to a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, social worker, guidance counselor, or other allied mental health professional who is duly licensed or registered with their respective professional regulatory bodies and is trained in mental health care.

(D) **Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program (MHSSP)** refers to a government scholarship program designed to support eligible individuals pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in mental health-related fields in exchange for a period of public service.

(E) **Public Service Obligation** refers to the mandatory period of service required from MHSSP scholars in government agencies, public schools, public hospitals, community health centers, or the E-Guidance Counselor Program, as determined by the implementing agencies.

(F) **Digital Platforms** refers to online websites, mobile applications, teleconferencing tools, and other electronic communication channels used to deliver mental health services.

Section 4. Establishment of the E-Guidance Counselor Program (EGCP).

(A) There is hereby established a nationwide E-Guidance Counselor Program (EGCP) to provide accessible, confidential, and free mental health support to young people. The Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), shall be the lead implementing agencies for the EGCP.

(B) The EGCP shall develop and maintain secure and user-friendly digital platforms for the delivery of mental health services, which shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Online individual and group counseling sessions;
- (2) Psychological first aid and crisis intervention;
- (3) Referrals to specialized mental health services and facilities;
- (4) Virtual support groups and peer counseling initiatives; and

(5) Regular webinars, digital resource kits, and awareness campaigns on mental health literacy, responsible digital engagement, and normalizing help-seeking behavior for schools, youth, and parents.

(C) The EGCP shall be staffed by qualified and licensed Mental Health Professionals, including those who have fulfilled their Public Service Obligation under the MHSSP. These professionals shall undergo specialized training in online counseling and digital mental health service delivery. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and relevant professional regulatory boards shall develop and enforce clear ethical guidelines and continuing professional development requirements specifically for online mental health practitioners within the EGCP.

(D) The EGCP shall ensure strict adherence to data privacy and confidentiality protocols, in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the “Data Privacy Act of 2012,” and other relevant ethical guidelines for mental health practice.

(E) The EGCP shall establish clear protocols for emergency interventions and referrals for cases requiring immediate face-to-face professional care.

(F) The EGCP shall implement a clear and accessible grievance mechanism, allowing users to file complaints regarding misconduct, unethical service, or data breaches, to ensure accountability and user protection.

Section 5. Establishment of the Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program (MHSSP).

(A) There is hereby established a Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program (MHSSP) to address the critical shortage of Mental Health Professionals in the country. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), in coordination with the DOH and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), shall be the lead implementing agencies for the MHSSP.

(B) The MHSSP shall provide scholarships to deserving Filipino citizens pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in mental health-related fields, including but not limited to:

(1) Psychology (Clinical, Counseling, Developmental);

(2) Psychiatry;

(3) Psychiatric Nursing;

(4) Social Work with mental health specialization;

(5) Guidance and Counseling; and

(6) Other allied mental health professions as determined by the CHED and DOH.

(C) Eligibility for the MHSSP shall be based on academic merit, financial need, and a demonstrated commitment to serving the mental health needs of the Filipino people, particularly the youth.

(D) The scholarship benefits shall cover tuition and other school fees, living allowance, book allowance, professional licensure examination fees, and other necessary expenses as determined by the CHED.

(E) Public Service Obligation – All MHSSP scholars shall be required to render a period of Public Service Obligation in government agencies, public schools, public hospitals, community health centers, or within the E-Guidance Counselor Program, upon completion of their studies and licensure. The duration of the Public Service Obligation shall be equivalent to one (1) year of service for every year of scholarship availed, or as otherwise determined by the Implementing Rules and Regulations, but not exceeding a maximum of five (5) years.

(F) Penalties for Non-Compliance – Any scholar who fails to comply with the Public Service Obligation without valid cause, as determined by the CHED, shall be required to reimburse the full amount of the scholarship benefits received, with appropriate interest, and may be subject to other legal remedies.

Section 6. Inter-Agency Coordination and Collaboration.

(A) The DOH, DepEd, DSWD, DICT, CHED, PRC, and local government units (LGUs) shall establish a Joint Coordinating Council to ensure the seamless integration and effective implementation of the E-Guidance Counselor Program and the Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program.

(B) The Council shall develop a comprehensive national mental health strategy for young people, integrating both digital and in-person services, and ensuring the optimal deployment of MHSSP graduates to areas of greatest need.

(C) Local Government Units (LGUs) shall play a crucial role in promoting awareness of the EGCP within their respective jurisdictions and in facilitating access for youth, particularly in remote and underserved areas, by identifying and supporting existing or establishing new physical access points such as public internet hubs, barangay centers, or school facilities.

Section 7. Monitoring and Evaluation.

(A) The lead implementing agencies shall establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for both the EGCP and MHSSP to assess their effectiveness, reach, and impact on the mental health and well-being of young people.

(B) Regular reports on the programs' performance, challenges, and recommendations for improvement shall be submitted to Congress.

Section 8. Appropriations. The amount necessary to carry out the initial implementation of this Act, including the establishment and operation of the E-Guidance Counselor Program, the Mental Health Specialization Scholarship Program, and necessary Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure upgrades for schools, barangay centers, or community hubs to facilitate access to EGCP services, shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 9. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, DepEd, DSWD, DICT, and CHED, in coordination with other relevant government agencies, professional organizations, and stakeholders, shall jointly formulate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

Section 10. Separability Clause. If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectivity of the other provisions hereof.

Section 11. Repealing Clause. All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Section 12. Effectivity. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,



HON. BRIAN DANIEL POE LLAMANZARES, PhD, MNSA

Representative

FPJ Panday Bayanihan Party-List