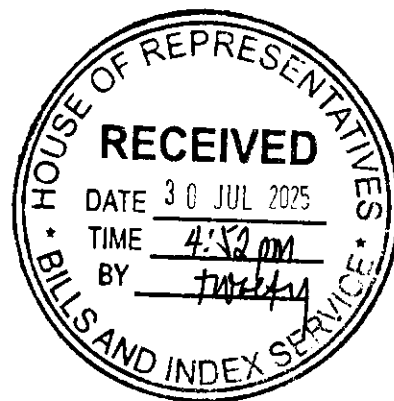




**Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila**

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

House Bill No. 2710



INTRODUCED BY Rep. ZIAUR-RAHMAN ALONTO ADIONG

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The global mental health crisis has laid bare the urgent need for accessible and responsive psychological services, particularly in underserved communities. In the Philippines, this need is especially pronounced. With a population of over 115 million, our country has only around 1,000 to 2,000 licensed psychologists. Not all of them are engaged in clinical practice, and even fewer are based in public institutions or assigned to rural areas. In some provinces, a psychologist may serve hundreds of thousands of individuals, or none may be available at all.

This critical shortage undermines the country's ability to respond effectively to mental health challenges, which have worsened in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardship, displacement, conflict, and the everyday stresses of life. While Republic Act No. 11036, or the "Mental Health Act," has begun laying the groundwork for a more responsive system, the implementation of its key provisions remains hampered by the lack of qualified professionals, especially in government facilities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a ratio of at least 1 psychologist per 5,000 individuals. In the Philippines, the real-world access ratio can fall as low as 1 psychologist per 1 million people. Bridging this gap requires not only the training of more psychologists, but also the institutional support to ensure they serve where they are needed most.

This bill seeks to address the chronic underdevelopment of the country's mental health workforce by establishing a Psychology Scholarship and Return Service (PSRS) Program. It aims to:

1. Expand access to psychology education by providing full scholarships to qualified students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and select private higher education institutions (HEIs) or in.
2. Ensure equitable deployment of psychologists by requiring a return service in public agencies and facilities, particularly those serving marginalized sectors;
3. Support national mental health goals as articulated in the Mental Health Act by building institutional capacity and ensuring that psychosocial care is available even in the most underserved areas.

The proposed PSRS Program includes free tuition and other academic fees, allowances for educational materials and licensure preparation, and a living stipend. In exchange, scholars must complete their psychology degree within the prescribed period and render return service in agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), local government units, state colleges and universities, and other government-run mental health facilities.

By investing in the next generation of mental health professionals and ensuring that their services are channeled into areas where they are most needed, this legislation seeks to break the cycle of neglect and bring mental health support within reach of all Filipinos.

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



REP. ZIAUR-RAHMAN ALONTO ADIONG
1st District, Lanao Del Sur



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**AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A PSYCHOLOGY SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN
SERVICE PROGRAM FOR DESERVING STUDENTS, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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

Section 1. Declaration of Policy.

It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote and protect the mental health and general well-being of the Filipino people, and to ensure the accessibility of psychological services to underserved and marginalized communities. Toward this end, the State shall establish a Psychology Scholarship and Return Service Program to support deserving students in pursuing degrees in psychology, and to strengthen the capacity of public institutions through the deployment of licensed psychologists and mental health professionals.

Section 2. Psychology Scholarship and Return Service (PSRS) Program.

There shall be established a **Psychology Scholarship and Return Service (PSRS) Program** for deserving students pursuing a **Bachelor of**

Science in Psychology, Master's Degree in Psychology, or Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology in state universities and colleges (SUCs). The PSRS Program shall provide the following benefits to qualified students:

- a. Free tuition and other school fees, including registration, laboratory, library, and publication fees;
- b. Allowance for required books, materials, and supplies;
- c. Allowance for licensure examination review and registration fees; and
- d. Stipend for daily living and educational expenses.

Section 3. Qualifications and Requirements.

To qualify for the PSRS Program, an applicant must:

- a. Be a Filipino citizen residing in the Philippines;
- b. Be a graduating student or a graduate of a relevant undergraduate program (for master's and doctoral applicants);
- c. Have no prior degree of the same level in psychology; and
- d. Have passed the admission requirements of the SUC or partner private HEI offering the psychology degree program.

Section 4. Conditions for Grant of Scholarship.

Students admitted to the PSRS Program shall be subject to the following conditions:

- a. Must sign a scholarship agreement prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

- b. Must carry the full academic load per term as required by the HEI and shall not unjustifiably underload;
- c. Must complete the psychology degree within the prescribed period;
- d. Must take the licensure examination within one (1) year after graduation, if applicable; and
- e. Must render return service as specified in Section 7 of this Act.

Section 5. Grounds for Termination and Repayment.

The scholarship shall be terminated and the scholar shall be required to reimburse the government the full cost of the scholarship, including allowances and support received, under the following circumstances:

- a. Failure to complete the program within the prescribed period just cause;
- b. Failure to comply with academic requirements or licensure examination requirements;
- c. Gross misconduct that damages the integrity of the HEI or public interest.

Section 6. Mandatory Return Service.

Within five (5) years from obtaining licensure (if required), the scholar shall render **two** (2) years of return service in government agencies or public institutions such as but not limited to the:

- a. Department of Health (DOH)
- b. Department of Education (DepEd)
- c. Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

- d. Local Government Units (LGUs)
- e. State universities and colleges (SUCs)
- f. Public hospitals, clinics, and mental health facilities
- g. Government rehabilitation centers
- h. Other government entities that provide mental health, psychosocial, and counseling services to underserved communities

Those appointed to plantilla positions during return service shall receive full compensation, benefits, and emoluments.

If a scholar is unable to secure a government post within three (3) years after licensure, they shall either:

- a. Reimburse the full cost of the scholarship; or
- b. Participate in an alternative compliance program as determined by CHED and the Psychological Association of the Philippines, including rendering pro bono services under Republic Act No. 11036 (Mental Health Act).

Section 7. Allocation and Planning.

CHED shall determine the annual number and regional allocation of scholars based on needs assessments of public mental health institutions and agencies.

Section 8. Coordination with the Mental Health Act.

The PSRS Program shall be implemented in line with the objectives of Republic Act No. 11036 (Mental Health Act), especially in relation to strengthening human resources for mental health, expanding community-based mental health care, and enhancing access to services.

Section 9. Sanctions.

Any licensed psychologist who has availed of the PSRS Program but fails or refuses to fulfill the required return service without valid cause shall pay twice the total amount of benefits received. This penalty shall not apply to those who are unable to comply due to force majeure or reasons beyond their control.

Section 10. Appropriations.

The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

Section 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations.

Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, CHED shall promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively implement this Act.

Section 12. Separability Clause.

If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 13. Repealing Clause.

All laws, executive orders, rules, or regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

Section 14. Effectivity.

This Act shall take effect after its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,