

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 4949



Introduced by **Representative AGATHA PAULA "AGAY" A. CRUZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The State cannot remain indifferent to the silent epidemic affecting its youth. Within the campuses of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), students confront rising rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. The statistics do not whisper; they scream. These conditions do not only disrupt academic performance, but they extinguish potential and, in too many cases, life itself.

The Mental Health Act laid the groundwork for a national mental health policy. But implementation remains uneven, especially in SUCs where vulnerable students most require accessible, reliable, and stigma-free mental health services. This bill builds upon that landmark law by placing mental health services right where they are most urgently needed.

The proposed measure mandates the creation of Mental Health Offices in all SUC campuses, staffed by trained professionals, equipped with crisis intervention protocols, and supported by digital telehealth systems to reach even the remotest of campuses. Faculty members and non-teaching personnel are also included as beneficiaries, in recognition of the fact that educators who are themselves unwell cannot effectively shape future leaders.

The bill likewise provides for the hiring, training, and career development of guidance counselors, psychologists, and related professionals, while creating shared-service arrangements to overcome resource gaps. Accountability mechanisms are also embedded through annual reporting to Congress and a mandatory review of implementation. Programs are expressly required to be gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, and culturally sensitive, consistent with constitutional and international obligations. Compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 is mandated to protect individual dignity and confidentiality.

This legislation affirms that mental health is not a peripheral concern but a prerequisite for educational equity and national productivity. A brilliant student cannot

flourish if shackled by untreated depression. A promising scholar cannot complete her degree if crippled by anxiety. A professor cannot mold minds if he himself is consumed by burnout. To ignore these realities is negligence.

The cost of this measure is finite and justifiable, but the cost of inaction is incalculable: wasted potential, fractured families, and lives irretrievably lost. The State cannot invoke fiscal prudence to justify moral abdication.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought, so that no student, teacher, or worker in our SUCs is left to fight unseen battles alone.


AGATHA PAULA "AGAY" AGUILAR CRUZ
Representative, Fifth Legislative District of Bulacan



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 4949

Introduced by **Representative AGATHA PAULA “AGAY” A. CRUZ**

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

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

1 **Section 1. Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the “State Universities and
2 Colleges (SUCs) Mental Health Service Act.”
3

4 **Section 2. Declaration of Policy.** – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
5 uphold the basic right of every Filipino to sound mental health and ensure access to
6 appropriate interventions, therapy, and treatment as needed. Pursuant to this mandate,
7 the State shall institute policies to promote the mental health and wellness of students,
8 faculty, teaching and non-teaching staff, and other personnel in the campuses of SUCs
9 through, among others, the establishment of a Mental Health Office in all SUCs, and the
10 hiring, training, and deployment of SUC-based mental health service personnel.
11

12 All SUCs shall ensure that proper and adequate mental health services are
13 provided to their students, faculty, and personnel. To this end, each SUC, through its
14 Mental Health Offices, shall design programs and provide services that will assist
15 students in resolving emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial issues that hinder learning,
16 and enhance the preparedness of the faculty and non-teaching personnel to foster an
17 enabling environment for learning and holistic development.
18

19 All programs and services under this Act shall be gender-responsive, disability-
20 inclusive, culturally appropriate, and compliant with Republic Act (R.A.) No. 10173,
21 otherwise known as the “Data Privacy Act of 2012.”
22

23 **Section 3. Definition of Terms.** – As used in this Act:
24

25 (a) *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license granted by

the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), holds at least a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling or related fields, without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather's clause of R.A. No. 9258, otherwise known as the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004," and is competent to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance, and to implement mental health programs.

(b) *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which an individual realizes one's abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully, contributes positively 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 continuum of the mental health support, including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are provided by mental health facilities and professionals.

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

(f) *SUC-based Mental Health Service Personnel* refers to any mental health professional hired or deployed by, or has a contract with an SUC to render mental health services in its campus.

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

Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall issue minimum standards for the operation of Mental Health Offices, including recommended counselor-to-student ratios, crisis response protocols, reporting mechanisms, and compliance with data privacy and ethical standards.

1 The Mental Health Offices shall establish campus hotlines with trained guidance
2 counselors to provide assistance to the SUC Community, with priority to those at risk of
3 self-harm or suicide.

4
5 The CHED and the SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall initiate and
6 sustain a campus-wide campaign to raise awareness on mental health, with emphasis on
7 suicide prevention, stress management, nutrition, and counseling.

8
9 Each Mental Health Office shall be staffed by trained mental health professionals
10 and shall establish mechanisms for timely crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and
11 referral to appropriate facilities.

12
13 SUCs may adopt digital and tele-mental health platforms, subject to CHED
14 guidelines and in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, to expand access to
15 services in remote or underserved campuses.

16
17 The CHED shall, in coordination with SUCs, the Department of Health (DOH), the
18 Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), PRC, and other concerned
19 agencies, enter into agreements to maximize existing national mental health services.

20
21 **Section 5. Hiring, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals. –**
22 SUCs shall hire, train, and deploy mental health professionals to their Mental Health
23 Offices within five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act, subject to CHED, CSC, and
24 DBM guidelines.

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

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

1 In campuses where the hiring of full-time professionals is not immediately feasible,
2 SUCs may, with CHED approval, establish regional or shared service arrangements with
3 other SUCs to pool and deploy mental health professionals.

4
5 CHED and SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall formulate a scheme for
6 the continuous training of mental health service personnel, taking into consideration the
7 latest scientific studies, psychosocial approaches and know-how on mental health and
8 mental health services, in accordance with the provisions of R.A. No. 10912, otherwise
9 known as the “Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016”.

10
11 **Section 6. State Universities and Colleges Mental Health Coordinating Council. –**
12 There is hereby created a State Universities and Colleges Mental Health Coordinating
13 Council, chaired by the CHED Chairperson, with representatives from DOH, DSWD,
14 PRC, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC), and student and
15 faculty representatives. The Council shall serve as the policy-coordinating body to oversee
16 implementation, recommend standards and address operational issues under this Act.

17
18 The Council shall also coordinate with local government units and the Philippine
19 Mental Health Council under R.A. No. 11036 to ensure integration of campus-based and
20 community-based mental health services.

21
22 **Section 7. Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals.**
23 – Subject to the mandates of the Civil Service Commission over government personnel
24 systems, the CHED, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH and PRC, shall:

- 25
26 (a) Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that shall include
27 provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, in-
28 service training, graduate scholarships, research grants, incentive award
29 system, and training on data privacy and ethical practice;
30
31 (b) Align salary grades of mental health professionals with related *plantilla* items
32 under R.A. No. 6758, otherwise known as the “Compensation and Position
33 Classification Act of 1989,” as amended;
34
35 (c) Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental
36 Health Professionals to the provisions of R.A. No. 10968, otherwise known as
37 the “Philippine Qualifications Framework Act”;
38
39 (d) Review SUC organizational structure to provide competent and professional
40 personnel who shall provide supervision and technical assistance to the
41 guidance counselors;
42
43 (e) Review, revise and develop duties and responsibilities of mental health
44 professionals in accordance with laws governing their professions;

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

(g) Provide periodic training to retool and upgrade the skills of mental health professionals.

Section 8. Salary Scale. – The career and salary scales of SUC-based mental health professionals shall provide for gradual progression from a minimum to a maximum salary by regular merit-based increments.

The entry level shall not be lower than Salary Grade 16. Psychometricians shall enter at Salary Grade 11. Salary grades provided under this Section shall be subject to the evaluation and approval of the DBM and shall be adjusted accordingly to align with national compensation policies.

Section 9. Contractual Hiring of Mental Health Personnel. – In case of a scarcity of mental health professionals willing to work full-time, SUCs may hire qualified professionals on a contractual or part-time basis, subject to DBM evaluation and the shared service arrangements provided under this Act.

Section 10. Benefits. – All mental health professionals employed under this Act shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and benefits provided in R.A. No. 7305, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of Public Health Workers”, R.A. No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, and other pertinent laws. Nothing in this Act shall diminish such rights and benefits already granted to mental health professionals under existing laws.

Section 10. Appropriations. – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR). – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, PASUC, and other concerned stakeholders, issue rules and regulations governing hiring, training and deployment of mental health personnel, and the implementation of this Act. The IRR shall include measurable performance indicators such as counselor-to-student ratios, service utilization rates, and crisis response times.

Section 12. Reporting. – CHED shall submit an annual report to Congress on the implementation of this Act, including performance indicators and program outcomes.

The Commission on Audit (COA) shall conduct a periodic audit of funds allocated under this Act and submit its findings to Congress.

1
2 **Section 12. *Supplementary Application.*** – This Act shall be construed as
3 supplementing R.A. No. 11036 and other applicable laws. Nothing herein shall diminish
4 the rights granted under such laws.
5

6 **Section 29. *Review.*** – Five (5) years after the effectivity of this Act, the CHED, in
7 coordination with the Council created under this Act, shall conduct a comprehensive
8 review of its implementation and submit recommendations to Congress, including
9 proposed amendments.
10

11 **Section 29. *Separability Clause.*** – If any part or provision of this Act is held
12 unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder thereof not otherwise affected shall remain in
13 full force and effect.
14

15 **Section 30. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules, and
16 regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby
17 repealed or modified accordingly.
18

19 **Section 31. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following the
20 completion of its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.
21

22 *Approved,*