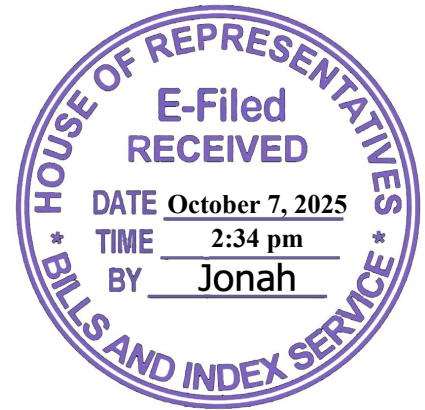


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 5240



Introduced by **HON. BRIAN RAYMUND S. YAMSUAN**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE CREATION OF AN ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLS, PROVIDING FOR TELECONSULTATION
SERVICES BY GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND MENTAL HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The mental health of students is fundamental to their learning and overall human development. However, alarming data reveals a growing crisis among Filipino youth. For school year 2021-2022 alone, the Department of Education (DepEd) reported 404 student suicides and 2,146 suicide attempts, underscoring the severity of the problem.¹ A 2021 analysis further highlighted that suicide attempts among Filipino youth had sharply risen to 7.5%, reflecting worsened psychosocial risks in recent years.² Health and education authorities have also emphasized the increasing burden of anxiety and depression among students, reinforcing the need for accessible, school-based support.³

In response, the State has taken significant steps through legislation. Key laws include

¹ Ramos, Marlon. (2023). Mental health crisis: 404 student suicides in 2021-22. Inquirer.net. Available at <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1723742/mental-health-crisis-404-student-suicides-in-2021-22>

² Alibudbud, R. (2023). Suicide among the youth and school-based suicide prevention: Exemplar and reflections from the Philippines, Asian Journal of Psychiatry, Volume 83. Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S187620182300093X>.

³ Margaretha, Margaretha; Azzopardi, Peter Sebastian; Fisher, Jane; Sawyer, Susan Margaret. (2023). School-based mental health promotion: A global policy review." PubMed Central (PMC). Available at [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10149729/](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10149729/)

Republic Act No. 9258, or the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, which professionalized the practice of guidance and counseling and set important ethical standards, and Republic Act No. 11036, also known as the Mental Health Act, which established a national mental health policy and affirmed the right of all Filipinos to mental health care. Most recently, Republic Act No. 12080 further strengthened school-based mental health services by establishing Mental Health and Well-Being Offices in schools.

Despite these measures, there remains a severe shortage of mental health professionals in schools. 2024 reports showed that there were 4,460 vacancies for guidance counselor positions that the Department of Education (DepEd) has yet to fill.⁴ It will reportedly take DepEd 14 years to fill all vacant guidance counselor positions in schools due to the limited number of graduates from master's degree programs in guidance and counseling every year.⁵

This proposed bill seeks to address these issues by making accessible, through an online platform, the mental health professionals we currently have in the country. This measure aims to establish a nationwide online mental health support program in schools, offering secure teleconsultation services by guidance counselors and licensed mental health professionals. This way, the shortage of mental health professionals physically present in schools may be addressed by providing students with online access to their services.

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


BRIAN RAYMUND S. YAMSUAN
Representative
2nd District of Parañaque

⁴ Chi, Cristina. (2024). DepEd needs 14 years to fill present shortage of guidance counselors, Philstar. Available at <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/08/13/2377604/deped-needs-14-years-fill-present-shortage-guidance-counselors>; Untalan, Sherilyn. (2025). Angara: Guidance counselor shortage worsens amid bullying surge in PH, GMA News. Available at <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/957874/angara-guidance-counselor-shortage-worsens-amid-bullying-surge-in-ph-schools/story/>.

⁵ *Id.*

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HOUSE BILL NO. 5240

Introduced by **HON. BRIAN RAYMUND S. YAMSUAN**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE CREATION OF A TELECOUNSELING PROGRAM FOR
PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PROVIDING FOR TELECONSULTATION SERVICES BY
GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, 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 “School Telecounseling Act.”

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. — The State affirms the basic right of all Filipinos to mental health and the fundamental rights of people who require mental health services. The State further recognizes the need to strengthen the guidance and counseling services and mental health support services offered in schools. Towards this end, the State shall ensure greater accessibility to such services through the establishment of a secure and reliable online mental health support program for public schools in the country.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. — As used in this Act, the following terms are defined as follows:

- (a) Mental Health Professionals - refers to guidance counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, or other allied mental health professionals who are duly licensed or registered with their respective professional regulatory bodies and trained in mental health care;
- (b) Public Schools - refers to schools supervised by the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED);

- (c) Telecounseling Program - refers to a government-financed initiative providing online mental health services, including counseling, psychological first aid, and referrals, through digital platforms; and
- (d) Teleconsultation - provision of mental health services by licensed mental health professionals through online platforms.

SECTION 4. Establishment of the Telecounseling Program for Public Schools.

– There is hereby established a nationwide Telecounseling Program to provide accessible and free mental health services to students in public schools. The Telecounseling Program shall make use of a secure digital platform for the delivery of mental health services by Mental Health Professionals, which shall include, but shall not be limited to:

- (a) Individual teleconsultations;
- (b) Group counseling sessions;
- (c) Psychological first aid; and
- (d) Referrals to specialized Mental Health Professionals, services, or facilities.

The Telecounseling Program shall strictly adhere to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and other relevant guidelines for mental health practice.

SECTION 5. Incentives for Mental Health Professionals. – Mental Health Professionals are hereby encouraged to participate in the Telecounseling Program. Mental Health Professionals who render services under this Act shall be entitled to continuing professional development credits duly recognized by the relevant professional regulatory board and a monthly honorarium, subject to the relevant guidelines of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

SECTION 6. Ethical Guidelines. – The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and relevant professional regulatory boards shall develop clear ethical guidelines and continuing professional development requirements for online mental health practitioners.

SECTION 7. Implementing Agencies. – The Department of Health (DOH), in coordination with DepEd, CHED, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), DBM, and the relevant professional regulatory bodies, shall be the lead implementing agencies for this Act. Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, DICT, DBM, relevant professional regulatory bodies, and other relevant government agencies, shall jointly formulate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 8. Appropriations. – The amount necessary for the establishment and operation of the Telecounseling Program, including the technology and infrastructure upgrades in schools to facilitate access to the Telecounseling Program, shall be included in the General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 9. Separability Clause. - Should any provision of this Act be declared unconstitutional, the remaining parts not affected thereby shall remain valid and operational.

SECTION 10. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, orders, circulars, issuances, rules and regulations and parts thereof which are inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SECTION 11. Effectivity. — This act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in any two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

Approved,