

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 6690



Introduced by
KABATAAN Party-list Rep. RENEE LOUISE M. CO,
Gabriela Women's Party Rep. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO, and
ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. ANTONIO L. TINIO

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Philippine Constitution enshrines the State's duty to protect and promote the right to health of the people under Article II, Section 15, and to promote and protect the physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being of the youth under Article II, Section 13. Further, Article XIII, Section 11 mandates an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development, making essential health services available to all at affordable cost, with priority for the underprivileged. These constitutional provisions establish the foundation for the State's obligation to address mental health as an integral component of the people's right to health and well-being.

Republic Act No. 11036, or the Mental Health Act of 2018, marked a significant legislative milestone in recognizing mental health as a fundamental right and state priority. However, its implementation has been gravely inadequate, particularly in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), where the mental health crisis among students, faculty, and personnel continues to intensify. The World Health Organization reports that one in seven adolescents aged 10-19 experiences a mental disorder, yet the institutional response in Philippine higher education institutions remains woefully insufficient.

The mental health crisis in SUCs is not merely a clinical or individual phenomenon but is deeply rooted in the material conditions imposed by neoliberal education policies. The commercialization and commodification of education, skyrocketing tuition and miscellaneous fees even in supposedly "free" SUCs, inadequate state subsidy, lack of dormitories and student support services,

contractualization of faculty and staff, and the overall deterioration of the quality of education have created an environment of chronic stress, anxiety, and despair among students and education workers alike. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and exacerbated these systemic failures, with students forced into online learning without adequate resources, faculty and staff subjected to heavier workloads without corresponding support, and mental health services virtually non-existent or inaccessible.

Current mental health services in SUCs, where they exist at all, are severely understaffed, underfunded, and inadequately equipped. Many SUCs operate with only one or two guidance counselors for thousands of students, making meaningful intervention and sustained support impossible. Mental health professionals in SUCs are overworked, underpaid, and lack the institutional support and professional development opportunities necessary to provide quality services. The absence of dedicated Mental Health Offices with sufficient personnel and resources has resulted in reactive rather than proactive mental health interventions, with many students suffering in silence or resorting to tragic measures.

This proposed measure seeks to address these systemic deficiencies by mandating the establishment of Mental Health Offices in all SUC campuses, ensuring the hiring, training, and deployment of adequate mental health professionals, and guaranteeing just compensation and benefits for these workers. Recognizing that mental health is not merely the absence of illness but a state of well-being that enables individuals to cope with life's stresses and contribute to their communities, this bill adopts a comprehensive approach that includes promotion, prevention, crisis intervention, and aftercare services.

The salient features of this bill are as follows:

First, it mandates the establishment of Mental Health Offices in all SUC campuses, institutionalizing mental health services as a core component of the university structure rather than a peripheral or optional service. These offices shall be equipped with campus hotlines, trained personnel, and comprehensive programs addressing the full spectrum of mental health needs.

Second, it requires SUCs to hire, train, and deploy adequate mental health professionals, including psychologists, guidance counselors, and other qualified personnel, ensuring that each SUC has sufficient mental health service providers within five years from effectivity. Recognizing the current shortage of licensed professionals, the bill allows for the hiring of college graduates with backgrounds in psychology or similar fields, provided they receive appropriate training and supervision and secure professional licenses within three years.

Third, it establishes just compensation for mental health professionals, setting the entry-level salary grade at no lower than Salary Grade 16, and ensures that these workers enjoy the rights, privileges, and benefits under the Magna Carta of Public Health Workers and other pertinent laws. This provision recognizes the professional

expertise and critical role of mental health workers and seeks to attract and retain qualified personnel in SUCs.

Fourth, it mandates comprehensive mental health education and awareness campaigns, including mandatory orientations for all incoming students, faculty, and staff, and the integration of mental health education into student development programs. This proactive approach aims to destigmatize mental health issues, promote help-seeking behavior, and build a campus culture of care and support.

Fifth, it requires the development of mechanisms for timely crisis intervention and suicide prevention, ensuring that SUCs are prepared to respond effectively to mental health emergencies and provide appropriate support to students and personnel at risk.

Sixth, it establishes a comprehensive professional development framework for mental health professionals, including provisions for continuous training, graduate scholarships, research grants, performance evaluation, and career advancement, ensuring that these workers have the support and opportunities necessary to provide quality services and grow professionally.

This measure represents a concrete step toward fulfilling the State's constitutional obligation to ensure the health and well-being of the youth and all Filipinos. However, it must be understood within the broader context of the struggle for genuine educational reform. The mental health crisis in SUCs cannot be fully resolved without addressing its root causes: the chronic underfunding of public education, the commercialization of learning, the contractualization of education workers, and the overall neoliberal assault on the right to accessible, quality, and nationalist education. This bill, therefore, must be seen as part of a larger agenda to defend and advance the people's right to education and health against the depredations of profit-driven policies.

The passage of this measure is urgent. Every day that SUCs operate without adequate mental health services is another day that students suffer, faculty and staff struggle without support, and lives are needlessly lost to preventable mental health crises. The establishment of Mental Health Offices with adequate personnel, resources, and programs is not merely a matter of policy preference but a constitutional imperative and a moral obligation to the youth and the Filipino people.

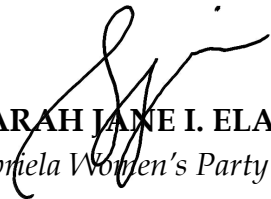
In view of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



REP. RENEE LOUISE M. CO
KABATAAN Party-list



REP. ANTONIO L. TINIO
ACT Teachers Party-list



REP. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO
Gabriela Women's Party

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AN ACT
STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OF STATE
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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 “State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) Mental Health Service Act”.

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

All SUCs shall ensure that proper and adequate mental health services are provided to their students, faculty, non-teaching staff and other personnel. In this regard, all SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall design programs and provide services that shall assist students in resolving emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial issues that are barriers to learning and enhance the preparedness of the faculty, teaching, non-teaching staff, and other personnel to foster an enabling environment for students to acquire knowledge and to develop intellectually.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* — As used in this Act:

- a) *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or certification granted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at the minimum a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling, Guidance, or Counseling, without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", and is competent to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance and implement mental health programs;
- b) *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one's own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution 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 whole range of the mental health support services including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are provided by mental health facilities and mental health professionals;
- e) *Psychologist* refers to a natural person who has professional training and clinical skills in psychotherapeutic intervention and assessment for mental health problems and possesses a license or certification granted by the PRC and holds at the minimum a master's degree in Psychology without prejudice to those granted licenses under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 10029, otherwise known as the "Philippine Psychology Act of 2009"; and
- f) *SUCs-based mental health service personnel* refers to any mental health professional who is 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) shall, subject to the rules and regulations of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the policies, standards, and guidelines of the CHED, require all SUCs to establish a Mental Health Office in all their campuses.

The Mental Health Offices shall set up campus hotlines with dedicated and trained guidance counselors to provide assistance to the whole SUC Community, especially the students. Special attention shall be given to those identified to have mental health problems or conditions, especially those at risk of committing suicide.

The CHED and the SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the collective consciousness about mental health. The awareness campaign shall give special emphasis to the issues of suicide prevention, stress handling, mental health and nutrition, and guidance and counseling. The campaign shall ensure that the whole SUC community, especially the students, is aware of in-campus mental health services.

The SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall implement mental health programs and projects designed to promote the mental health and well-being of faculty, students, and personnel alike.

Each Mental Health Office shall be manned by trained mental health professionals who shall serve as the mental health service personnel of the SUCs.

The SUCs-based mental health service personnel of the Mental Health Offices, including those who shall be hired upon the effectivity of this Act, shall create a mechanism for timely crisis intervention and suicide prevention and the appropriate response strategies for the whole SUCs community, especially the students.

The SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall also integrate mental health education into student development programs and institutional orientations, providing training in resilience, coping strategies, emotional regulation, and stress management for all students and personnel. A mandatory mental health orientation shall be conducted at the beginning of every academic year for incoming students, faculty, and staff.

The CHED shall, in coordination with the SUCs, establish mechanisms to maximize existing services offered by other executive departments such as the attached agencies to the Department of Health (DOH) dealing with mental health and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

SECTION 5. *Hiring, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals.* – Subject to the guidelines set by the CHED and the SUCs, CSC and DBM, the SUCs shall hire, train and deploy mental health professionals, including a psychologist, to the Mental Health Office to ensure that each SUC shall have mental health professionals or mental health service providers within five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act.

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

Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”, SUCs may hire, as may be necessary, college graduates who do not yet qualify as mental health professionals but who possess a background in psychology or similar fields to provide mental health

services: *Provided*, That the CHED shall provide for the appropriate training and instruction of such college graduates in order for them to gain and develop the necessary skills to render counselling services to faculty, students and school personnel, and assist them in managing mental health issues: *Provided, further*, That such services shall be rendered under the supervision of qualified mental health professionals within the schools division: *Provided, finally*, That a college graduate hired to work in a Mental Health Office shall, within three (3) years from the date of employment in the SUC, secure the appropriate license to practice as a mental health professional and meet the relevant qualification requirements of their position.

The CHED and the SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall formulate a scheme for the continuous training of mental health service personnel, taking into consideration the latest scientific studies, psycho-social approaches and know-how on mental health and mental health services, in accordance with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10912, otherwise known as the "Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016".

SECTION 6. *Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals.*

– The CHED shall, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH and the PRC:

- a) Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that shall include provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, inservice training, graduate scholarships, research grants, and incentive award system;
- b) Match the salary grades of mental health professionals with related plantilla items under the provisions of Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the "Compensation and Position Classification Act of 1989," as amended;
- c) Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental Health Professionals to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10968, otherwise known as the "Philippine Qualifications Framework Act";
- d) Revisit the organizational structure of the SUCs to provide competent and professional personnel who shall provide supervision and technical assistance to the guidance counselors;
- e) Review, revise and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health 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, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of mental health professionals.

SECTION 7. *Salary Scale.* — The career and salary scales of mental health professionals in SUCs shall provide for a gradual progression from a minimum to a maximum salary by means of regular increments, to be given regularly based on merit and competencies.

The entry level of mental health professionals shall not be lower than Salary Grade 16. Mental health professionals hired by SUCs as Psychometricians shall be hired at Salary Grade 11 at the entry level.

SECTION 8. *Benefits.* — All mental health professionals employed in the various Mental Health Offices shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and other benefits provided in Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of Public Health Workers”, Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, and other pertinent laws.

SECTION 9. *Appropriations.* — The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 10. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* — Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other concerned stakeholders, issue rules and regulations to govern the hiring, training and deployment of guidance counselors, psychologists and other mental health service personnel in SUCs, and for the implementation of this Act.

SECTION 11. *Suppletory Application.* — The applicable provisions of Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, insofar as they are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, shall apply suppletorily.

SECTION 12. *Separability Clause.* — If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected, shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 13. *Repealing Clause.* — Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

SECTION 14. *Effectivity.* — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,