



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

20th CONGRESS
1st Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 7715

Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVE JENNIFER A. LAGBAS**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Suicide is a serious public health concern in the Philippines and across the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide reporting in the media has the potential to either strengthen or damage national suicide-prevention efforts. Media coverage that is sensational, graphic, repetitive, or that provides explicit details about the method and location of suicide increases the risk of imitative behavior (also known as suicide contagion or the Werther Effect) which has been extensively documented in global research. WHO's *Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals (2023 Update)* emphasizes that irresponsible reporting can directly elevate suicide risk, particularly among vulnerable individuals such as the youth, persons with pre-existing mental health conditions, and communities experiencing distress.

WHO underscores that responsible, sensitive, and factual reporting can have the opposite effect. When the media avoids harmful practices and instead provides information on where and how to seek help, presents accurate mental-health facts, and highlights stories of recovery and hope, reporting can contribute to what is known as the "*Papageno effect*," where exposure to coping narratives reduces suicidal ideation and encourages help-seeking.

A systematic literature review covering sixty-six (66) studies across six WHO regions found persistently high rates of guideline violations, particularly involving the disclosure of method, location, and unnecessary visual details, while compliance with recommended preventive reporting practices remained extremely low. These findings demonstrate the need for national-level policy interventions to promote ethical media conduct and protect the mental health of the public.

In the Philippines, there is currently no law, albeit a DOH Administrative Order exists, that sets minimum standards for the responsible reporting of suicide. Journalists, broadcasters, digital

content creators, and public information officers operate without a unified framework that reflects international best practices and the public health implications of reporting. While individual media organizations, press councils, or broadcasters may maintain ethical codes, these vary widely and lack the consistency and enforceability needed to protect vulnerable Filipinos from harmful exposure.

This bill seeks to fill that gap by establishing the **Responsible Suicide Reporting Guidelines (RSRG)**, a set of minimum standards rooted in WHO guidelines and adapted to the Philippine context. The bill does not prohibit the reporting of suicide, nor does it restrict legitimate news coverage. Instead, it regulates only those aspects of reporting that have been scientifically demonstrated to increase suicide risk when handled irresponsibly. The measure prohibits the publication of explicit method and location details, sensationalized or romanticized language, photographs or videos of the deceased or the scene, and stigmatizing terminology. It likewise requires the use of non-criminalizing language, the inclusion of crisis hotline information, the presentation of factual and educational content, and the exercise of sensitivity when dealing with bereaved families.

The State has both the authority and the responsibility to regulate the manner of reporting when such reporting directly affects public health and safety. This measure respects freedom of the press while recognizing that the Constitution equally obliges the State to protect the health and well-being of its people. The bill represents a balanced, evidence-based approach that upholds press freedom, promotes mental-health literacy, prevents avoidable harm, and supports national suicide-prevention efforts.

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



HON. JENNIFER A. LAGBAS
Representative
First District, Misamis Oriental



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AN ACT
PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE REPORTING AND COVERAGE OF SUICIDE CASES
IN THE MEDIA, PROVIDING STANDARDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

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 “Responsible Suicide Reporting Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right to health and mental well-being of all Filipinos, consistent with Article II, Section 15 of the Constitution.

The State recognizes the substantial body of scientific evidence, as reflected in the *World Health Organization’s Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals (2023 Update)*, that improper, sensational, or repetitive reporting of suicide increases the risk of imitative behavior or “suicide contagion.” The State further acknowledges that responsible, sensitive, and educational reporting can reduce suicide risk and encourage help-seeking among vulnerable individuals.

Toward this end, the State shall promote responsible reporting practices among media entities, without unduly restraining freedom of the press, by regulating only those aspects of reporting that directly affect public health and safety.

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

- (a) *Media* refers to all print, broadcast, online, digital, and social media organizations or platforms that disseminate news or information to the public;

- (b) *Normalizing Language* refers to language that makes suicide seem common or portrays it as an appropriate and adaptive coping mechanism;
- (c) *Suicide* refers to death caused by self-inflicted harm with intent to die, and, for purposes of reporting standards, includes attempted suicide;
- (d) *Reporting* refers to the delivery of news and information on print, broadcast, or online platforms, on a particular material and other related developments; and
- (e) *Responsible Suicide Reporting Guidelines (RSRG)* refer to the standards established under this Act.

SEC. 4. Mandatory Responsible Suicide Reporting Standards. - All media entities shall comply with the Responsible Suicide Reporting Guidelines (RSRG) established in this Act. These standards aim to reduce the risk of suicide contagion and promote accurate, sensitive, and educational reporting.

(a) **Prohibited Practices:**

- (i) Media entities shall not describe, whether explicitly or implicitly, the specific method that was used in a suicide;
- (ii) Media entities shall not provide details about the exact site or location of a suicide, including recognizable landmarks, rooms, or structures;
- (iii) Media entities shall not use sensational, graphic, romanticized, or normalizing language in the headlines or body of any report involving suicide;
- (iv) Media entities shall not repeatedly publish suicide stories or place them in prominent positions, such as front pages or banner placements;
- (v) Media entities shall not use photographs, video footage, audio recordings, or digital or social media content that depict the deceased, the suicide act, the surrounding environment, or any visual element directly connected to the death;
- (vi) Media entities shall not publish or quote the contents of suicide notes, in whole or in part;
- (vii) Media entities shall not oversimplify the factors that led to a suicide or reduce it to a single cause; and
- (viii) Media entities shall not use inaccurate or stigmatizing terminology such as “committed suicide,” “successful suicide,” “failed suicide attempt,” or similar phrases.

(b) **Required Practices:**

- (i) Media entities shall provide accurate information on where and how individuals can seek help when experiencing suicidal thoughts or emotional crises;
- (ii) Media entities shall include factual and scientifically grounded information about suicide, including its warning signs and available interventions, in order to educate the public and correct common myths;
- (iii) Media entities shall report, where appropriate, stories of recovery, help-seeking, and coping with life’s stressors;
- (iv) Media entities shall exercise particular caution when reporting on suicides involving celebrities;

- (v) Media entities shall treat bereaved families, close friends, and persons with lived experience of suicide with sensitivity and respect during interviews, and shall ensure that such individuals are not pressured or exploited; and
- (vi) Media entities shall consistently use non-stigmatizing and non-criminalizing language such as “died by suicide,” “death by suicide,” or “suicide attempt.”

SEC. 5. *Protection of Personal and Sensitive Information.* - Media entities shall protect the privacy and dignity of individuals and families involved in suicide cases. Media entities shall not identify the deceased by name unless informed consent is provided by the next of kin, or unless there exists a clear and compelling public interest.

Media entities shall never identify minors involved in suicide cases under any circumstances. Media entities shall also refrain from publishing photographs of the deceased, the bereaved family, funeral rites, or any images associated with the suicide.

SEC 6. *Mandatory Inclusion of Crisis Hotlines.* - Any media report that involves suicide, attempted suicide, or self-harm shall include, in a clear and visible manner, the contact information of nationally accredited crisis hotlines, mental health support services, or emergency response systems.

SEC. 7. *Duties and Responsibilities of Government Agencies.* - The Department of Health shall be responsible for issuing, updating, and disseminating the Responsible Suicide Reporting Guidelines every three years, in alignment with WHO developments and local scientific data. The Philippine Information Agency shall conduct nationwide training and public information campaigns to ensure that media practitioners, journalism students, and content creators understand the standards set by this Act. Media oversight bodies, press councils, and other relevant media organizations shall integrate the RSRG into their accreditation standards and ethical review mechanisms.

SEC. 8. *Compliance Mechanisms and Administrative Liability.* - Without prejudice to other applicable laws, any media entity that violates the prohibited practices under this Act may be issued a written reprimand, required to publish a correction or take down the offending material, assessed administrative fines, or, in cases of repeated or willful violations, subjected to temporary suspension of accreditation.

Public officials who release prohibited information, such as specific methods or locations, shall be subject to the appropriate administrative sanction.

SEC. 9. *Education and Capacity-Building.* - All journalism schools, mass communication programs, and training institutions shall incorporate responsible suicide-reporting principles into their curricula. These institutions shall ensure that students understand the scientific basis for responsible reporting and the public health risks associated with improper coverage.

SEC. 10. *Appropriations.* - The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the appropriations of the Department of Health and the Philippine Information Agency under the current General Appropriations Act.

Thereafter, such amounts as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. *Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).* - The Department of Health, in coordination with the Philippine Council for Mental Health, Philippine Information Agency, the National Privacy Commission, and relevant press councils, shall promulgate the implementing rules and regulations within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 11. *Separability Clause.* - If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions shall continue to be in full force and effect.

SEC. 12. *Effectivity.* - This Act shall take effect thirty (30) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,