

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 9138



Introduced by **HON. PHILIP CONRAD "DOK BONG" M. ACOP**

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND DIGITAL
WELLBEING PROGRAM, PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN
SCHOOLS, REGULATING HARMFUL DIGITAL PRACTICES, AND
STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION FOR FILIPINO STUDENTS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In an era where a teenager's self-worth is often measured in likes and their social life is mediated by algorithms, the boundary between the "real world" and the digital one has effectively vanished. For the Filipino youth, this hyper-connectivity has come at a steep price. We are witnessing a quiet epidemic—a generation that is more connected yet more lonely than any before it. The Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing for Youth Act of 2026 is not just another piece of legislation; it is a necessary lifeline thrown into the turbulent waters of the digital age.

Mental health is the invisible foundation upon which every other aspect of a human life is built. It dictates how a student learns, how a worker produces, and how a citizen engages with their community. When we neglect the psychological state of our youth, we are not just ignoring a personal struggle; we are compromising the future cognitive and emotional capital of our nation. A mind clouded by anxiety or fractured by digital addiction cannot innovate, empathize, or lead. By prioritizing mental health, we are acknowledging that a "productive" citizen must first be a "whole" human being.

This Act is a vital intervention for the stakeholders who form the backbone of our education system. For students, it transforms schools from high-pressure academic factories into sanctuaries where their internal struggles are met with professional clinical support rather than stigma. For educators, the legislation provides the much-needed "mental health first aid" training, moving away from punitive discipline and toward trauma-informed empathy. For parents, it offers a sense of security, knowing that the digital platforms their children navigate are finally being held to a standard of "well-being by design," rather than profit-driven addiction.

On a broader scale, this legislation is a cornerstone for our country's social resilience. A society is only as strong as its most vulnerable members, and currently, our youth are being buffeted by global digital trends that promote isolation and comparison. By institutionalizing mental health services and regulating harmful digital practices, the Philippines is taking a stand: we refuse to let our future generations be the "guinea pigs" of unregulated technology. This Act signals a shift toward a more compassionate society that values human connection over screen time and emotional intelligence over algorithmic engagement.

This Act seeks to bridge the gap between the classroom and the clinic through a multi-pronged approach. At its core, the bill mandates the National Youth Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing Program, which ensures that every public high school, and state university and college is staffed with at least one licensed mental health professional—be it a psychologist or a guidance counselor—within three years. This move de-privatizes mental healthcare, making professional support a right rather than a luxury for the Filipino student. Furthermore, it introduces mandatory annual "wellness mapping" to identify at-risk students early, alongside teacher training programs focused on empathy-based discipline.

Beyond the physical walls of the school, the Act tackles the invisible influence of technology. One of its most distinctive features is the institutionalization of an annual "Digital Detox Week," starting in the 2026-2027 school year, designed to recalibrate students' relationship with their devices through offline engagement and nature. Crucially, the bill demands accountability from digital platforms, requiring the DOH and DICT to monitor and report on "algorithmic harm" and digital addiction. Through a coordinated funding effort involving the General Appropriations Act and local government support, this law ensures that the protection of the Filipino mind is a well-funded, nationwide priority.

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


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SECTION 1. This Act shall be known as the “Mental Health and Digital Wellbeing for Youth Act of 2026.”

SECTION 2. It is the policy of the State to protect the mental, emotional, and psychological health of the Filipino youth. Recognizing the rising incidence of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and digital addiction among students, the State shall institutionalize responsive, school-based mental health services and regulate the harmful effects of digital platforms on the well-being of minors.

SECTION 3. This Act aims to:

- a. Ensure access to early, preventive, and non-stigmatizing mental health support in all public schools and State Universities and Colleges (SUCs);
- b. Deploy trained mental health professionals to educational institutions nationwide;
- c. Regulate youth-targeted digital platforms to prevent algorithmic harm and addictive design;
- d. Promote digital literacy and emotional resilience among students;
- e. Create a nationwide platform for youth mental health support through technology.

SECTION 4. The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall implement comprehensive mental health services in all public secondary schools and SUCS, including:

- a. Deployment of at least one licensed mental health professional (psychologist, guidance counselor, or psychiatric nurse) per public high school and university campus within three (3) years from the effectivity of this Act;

- b. Annual mental health screenings and wellness mapping for students; and creation of safe spaces for counseling, peer support, and emotional processing;
- c. Confidential and non-punitive referral system for at-risk students;
- d. Training programs for teachers on mental health first aid, trauma-informed approaches, and empathy-based discipline.

SECTION 5. All schools shall observe an annual “Digital Detox Week,” a week-long series of activities promoting offline connections, creative expression, nature engagement, and digital self-regulation. DepEd and CHED shall integrate Digital Detox Week into the official school calendar starting School Year 2026-2027.

SECTION 6. DepEd, CHED, and the Department of Health (DOH) shall publish an annual report on Youth Mental Health and Digital Behavior, covering:

- a. Trends in depression, anxiety, digital usage, and suicide risk among students;
- b. Regional disparities and emerging mental health issues;
- c. Policy recommendations and accountability of digital platforms.

SECTION 7. The necessary funds for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA). The DepEd, CHED, DOH, and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) shall coordinate to ensure adequate and timely release of funds. Local government units (LGUs) may also allocate funds to support this Act within their jurisdiction.

SECTION 8. Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, and DICT shall convene a Joint Task Force to draft the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

SECTION 9. If any provision or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 10. All laws, executive orders, issuances, and rules and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 11. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,