

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. 10997



Introduced by Representative Timothy Joseph Cayton

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Programme for International Student Assessment recorded the Philippines as having the highest incidence of bullying among all participating countries in 2018, with 65% of Filipino learners reporting bullying at least a few times a month; in 2022, roughly 43% of girls and 53% of boys still reported repeated monthly incidents, against OECD averages of about 20% and 21%.¹ DepEd itself has declared bullying a national concern rather than a school-level problem.² Meanwhile, the National Center for Mental Health registered 7,189 suicide-related hotline calls from January to September 2025 mostly from individuals aged 18 to 30.³ These are the ordinary, daily conditions that a functioning guidance service exists to meet.

Yet Filipino learners are in the middle of a mental health crisis that our schools are not staffed to answer. In the hearing of the Committee on Appropriations on 3 September 2025, the Department of Education (DepEd) confirmed that the country had only 4,069 licensed guidance counselors as against the more than 50,000 required to meet the recommended global ratio of one counselor for every 250 students.⁴ Roughly 79% of DepEd guidance counselor positions (4,460 positions) remain unfilled, with several regions posting vacancy rates above 80% and with single counselors covering multiple campuses.⁵ Higher education fares no better: data of the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA) show an 80% shortfall in higher education institutions (HEIs), where only 1,029 counselors serve against an ideal requirement of 5,315.⁶

¹ EDCOM II, "High incidence of bullying in PH public schools alarming," 13 June 2024, citing OECD, PISA 2018 and PISA 2022 results.

² "Angara convenes the largest executive committee to combat bullying," Department of Education, 15 April 2025.

³ "Mental health crisis hotline receives 7,189 suicide-related calls," The Philippine Star, 2 November 2025, reporting National Center for Mental Health data for January to September 2025.

⁴ Statement of DepEd Secretary Juan Edgardo Angara before the House Committee on Appropriations, 3 September 2025, as reported in "Angara: Guidance counselor shortage worsens amid bullying surge in PH schools."

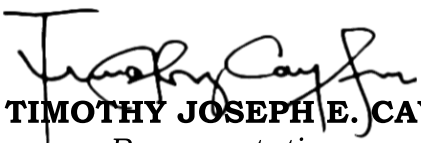
⁵ Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), Turning Point: A Decade of Necessary Reform (2026–2035), Final Report, Priority 10: Home and School Environment, Issue No. 3, p. 198.

⁶ Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association survey data, as cited in Villarin et al., "The State of Guidance Counseling in Philippine Education," International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRIS), Vol. 1, Issue No. 5 (2024).

The deficiency is not one of demand but of supply. Since 2008, only a little over 3,000 individuals have passed the licensure examination for guidance counselors.⁷ Against approximately 4,286 counselors needed and only about 339 graduates of master's programs in Guidance and Counseling produced each year, there are roughly seventeen (17) vacant posts for every graduate, and the system would require twelve (12) to fourteen (14) years to close the existing gap even on the heroic assumptions of zero attrition and zero enrollment growth.⁸ The bottleneck is the graduate degree itself: Republic Act No. 9258 requires both a master's degree and licensure,⁹ yet the cost of that degree is borne almost entirely by the individual, while entry-level compensation begins at Salary Grade 11 (PhP 31,705.00) and rises only to PhP 36,125.00 at Salary Grade 13 for the same qualification.¹⁰

This bill institutionalizes that investment as a permanent national program. A scholarship alone will not solve a problem this large, and this bill does not pretend otherwise. It does, however, address the single constraint that no amount of plantilla creation, campus security hardware, or emergency deployment can overcome: there are simply not enough licensed professionals to hire. Metal detectors screen for weapons; only a counselor can screen for despair.

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


ATTY. TIMOTHY JOSEPH E. CAYTON, Ph.D.
Representative
Lone District of Nueva Vizcaya

⁷ EDCOM II Final Report, *supra* note 14, p. 198.

⁸ Computed from DepEd Government Manpower Information System data as of 30 June 2025 and CHED-OPRKM enrollment data for A.Y. 2022–2024, as presented in EDCOM II Final Report, *supra* note 14, Figure 24, p. 198.

⁹ Rep. Act No. 9258 (2004), Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, secs. 13–14.

¹⁰ DBM Budget Circular No. 2018-4 (16 October 2018), Index of Occupational Services, Occupational Groups, Classes and Salary Grades, p. 119; Civil Service Commission job postings for Guidance Counselor I to III under the Department of Education.

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AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR GRADUATE
STUDIES IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING, STRENGTHENING THE
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING WORKFORCE OF THE COUNTRY, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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

SEC. 1. Short Title. — This Act shall be known as the “*National Guidance and Counseling Scholarship Act.*”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education and to the highest attainable standard of mental health, and to maintain a system of scholarship grants available to deserving students. Toward this end, the State shall build a sufficient, competent, and equitably distributed corps of Registered Guidance Counselors by financing graduate education in Guidance and Counseling, directing that investment to underserved regions, and securing a period of public service in return.

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

- (a) Program refers to the Scholarship Program established under Section 4 of this Act;
- (b) Registered Guidance Counselor (RGC) refers to a person duly registered and licensed under Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”;

- (c) School Counselor Associate (SCA) refers to the position created under Republic Act No. 12080;
- (d) Qualifying Program refers to a master's degree program in Guidance and Counseling, or an allied graduate program certified under Section 12 of this Act, offered by a higher education institution (HEI) recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED);
- (e) Priority Region refers to a region whose guidance counselor vacancy rate exceeds eighty percent (80%) based on the latest data of the Department of Education (DepEd), CHED, and the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA); and
- (f) Scholar refers to a person admitted to and receiving benefits under the Program.

SEC. 4. Establishment of the Program. — There is hereby established a permanent national scholarship program for graduate studies in Guidance and Counseling, to be administered by CHED in coordination with DepEd, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), the Civil Service Commission (CSC), and the PGCA. The Program shall finance the completion of Qualifying Programs leading to licensure as an RGC and shall support the core guidance services of testing, individual inventory, orientation, career guidance, counseling, and follow-up.

SEC. 5. Scope and Coverage. — The Program shall cover master's degree programs in Guidance and Counseling and allied graduate programs certified under Section 12. It shall be open to: (a) personnel of DepEd endorsed by their Schools Division Offices (SDOs); (b) personnel of public and private HEIs, state universities and colleges, and local government units; and (c) other qualified Filipino citizens. Not less than sixty percent (60%) of annual slots shall be reserved for DepEd personnel and not less than twenty percent (20%) for open-category applicants.

SEC. 6. Qualifications. — An applicant shall:

- (a) be a Filipino citizen and a resident of the Philippines;
- (b) hold a bachelor's degree in Guidance and Counseling or in an allied discipline acceptable under Republic Act No. 9258 and the standards of the PRC Board of Guidance and Counseling;
- (c) have obtained an undergraduate general weighted average of at least eighty-five percent (85%) or its equivalent, subject to such adjustment as the implementing rules may allow for applicants

from Priority Regions and geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs);

(d) have been admitted to or be enrolled in a Qualifying Program; and

(e) be of good moral character, with no pending criminal, administrative, or disciplinary case.

SEC. 7. Scholarship Benefits. — A Scholar shall receive:

(a) tuition and other school fees, paid directly to the delivering HEI;

(b) a monthly living stipend; and

(c) book, thesis, licensure review, and connectivity allowances as may be provided in the implementing rules.

The amounts shall be set by CHED in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and shall be reviewed at least once every three (3) years to account for the normative cost of education and inflation. Support shall cover two (2) academic years, extendible for one (1) academic year for thesis completion, and shall include coverage of the fees for one (1) taking of the licensure examination.

SEC. 8. Allocation of Slots. — CHED shall determine the number of slots annually. Each CHED Regional Office shall receive a minimum allocation, and Priority Regions shall receive at least fifteen percent (15%) more than the base allocation. Unfilled slots in a region may be reallocated only after all qualified applicants in that region have been exhausted, and such reallocation shall not reduce the allocation of a Priority Region. The final allocation shall be published at least ninety (90) days before the start of the relevant academic year.

SEC. 9. Selection. — Applications shall be filed with the CHED Regional Office having jurisdiction over the applicant's residence or HEI and evaluated by a Selection Committee composed of representatives of CHED, DepEd, and the PGCA, on the basis of academic performance, financial need, demonstrated commitment to the profession, and geographic priority. In case of a tie, preference shall be given, in order, to applicants from GIDAs, applicants from regions with the highest vacancy rates, and public school personnel with the longest service.

SEC. 10. Return Service. — A Scholar shall render return service as an RGC, or in a guidance and counseling capacity pending licensure, in a public school, state university or college, or government agency for a period equivalent to the duration of the scholarship received, but in no case less than two (2) years. Deployment shall prioritize Priority Regions and GIDAs.

Service rendered in a GIDA shall be credited at one and one-half (1.5) years for every year of actual service.

SEC. 11. Bridging Pathway for School Counselor Associates. — Incumbent School Counselor Associates shall be accorded preferential consideration under the Program. CHED, DepEd, the CSC, and the PRC shall jointly establish a bridging pathway allowing an SCA to pursue a Qualifying Program without forfeiting the position, through study leave, flexible or modular delivery, or a similar arrangement, and shall determine the extent to which supervised practice as an SCA may be credited toward practicum requirements.

SEC. 12. Certification of Allied Graduate Programs. — Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act, the PRC Board of Guidance and Counseling, in coordination with CHED, shall issue and thereafter maintain a published list of graduate programs whose completion qualifies a graduate to sit for the licensure examination for guidance counselors.

SEC. 13. Refund. — A Scholar shall refund the benefits received, in whole or in part as the implementing rules may provide, in case of voluntary withdrawal without justifiable cause, failure to complete the Qualifying Program, failure to take the licensure examination within two (2) years from graduation, failure to render return service, or misrepresentation.

SEC. 14. Roles of Agencies. — For purposes of this Act:

- (a) CHED shall administer the Program, issue guidelines, maintain the national registry of Scholars, and evaluate program performance;
- (b) DepEd shall endorse employee-applicants, furnish annual vacancy and deployment data by SDO, designate deployment areas, and integrate Scholars into its staffing plan;
- (c) the PRC, through the Board of Guidance and Counseling, shall certify qualifying academic credentials and furnish licensure and pass-rate data;
- (d) the CSC shall advise on eligibility and appointment requirements and facilitate recognition of Republic Act No. 1080 eligibility for appointment purposes; and
- (e) the PGCA shall provide distribution data, designate mentors for Scholars, and sit in the Selection Committee.

SEC. 15. Review of Compensation and Career Progression. — Within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act, the DBM, in coordination with the CSC, DepEd, and CHED, shall review and submit to Congress its recommendations on the salary structure and career progression of guidance counselors in the public sector, including the differentials among Salary

Grades 11, 12, and 13, the creation of higher promotional ranks, and the grant of hardship or assignment premiums for counselors deployed in Priority Regions and GIDAs.

SEC. 16. Monitoring and Report to Congress. — CHED, in coordination with DepEd and the PGCA, shall conduct an annual evaluation of the Program covering enrollment and graduation, licensure pass rates, deployment and return service compliance, regional distribution of beneficiaries, and the resulting movement in the counselor-to-student ratio. The report shall be submitted to the President and to both Houses of Congress not later than the last working day of March of the succeeding year.

SEC. 17. Appropriations. — The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of CHED, including the appropriation for specialized post-graduate scholarships under the General Appropriations Act. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 18. Implementing Rules and Regulations. — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, CHED and DepEd, in consultation with the PRC, the CSC, the DBM, and the PGCA, shall promulgate the rules and regulations necessary to implement this Act.

SEC. 19. Separability Clause. — If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 20. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 21. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,