

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 11441



Introduced by: **REP. SALVADOR A. PLEYTO, SR.**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Mental health is a fundamental component of overall well-being, directly influencing a child's capacity to learn, build healthy relationships, and navigate life's challenges. In recent years, the urgency of addressing mental health issues among Filipino youth has escalated significantly. Rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm among primary and secondary school students have reached alarming levels, further exacerbated by modern social pressures, economic difficulties, and the aftermath of global disruptions.

Despite the enactment of Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the "Philippine Mental Health Act," and Republic Act No. 11206, or the "Career Guidance and Counseling Act," a severe gap remains in the actual delivery of mental health services within the basic education system. Currently, the public school system faces a catastrophic shortage of registered guidance counselors (RGCs), primarily due to low salary grades and non-competitive compensation structures. Consequently, thousands of elementary and high schools across the country operate without a single mental health professional on site.

This bill seeks to address these critical vulnerabilities by establishing a comprehensive Mental Health Program in all public and private elementary and high schools nationwide and creating a dedicated mental health personnel positions with competitive compensation packages (adjusting salary grades for Guidance Counselors and creating Mental Health Associate positions) to recruit and retain qualified professionals.

Prioritizing the mental health of our learners is an urgent social imperative. By building a resilient, supportive, and accessible mental health infrastructure within our schools, we safeguard the future of our nation.

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


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**AN ACT STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN ALL PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE,
CREATING THE POSITIONS OF SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES**

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

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* — This Act shall be known as the "Basic Education Mental Health Service Enhancement Act."

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* — It is the policy of the State to protect and promote the physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being of the youth. The State recognizes the vital role of mental health in holistic student development and shall guarantee the provision of accessible, timely, and quality school-based mental health services in all basic education institutions to prevent harm, violence, and psychological distress.

SEC. 3. *Objectives.* — This Act aims to:

(a) Establish comprehensive and age-appropriate school-based mental health programs in all elementary and high schools;

(b) Address the critical shortage of school guidance counselors and mental health professionals through competitive compensation and revised qualification standards;

(c) Integrate mental health awareness and education into the basic education curriculum;

(d) Provide clear referral pathways, early threat identification, and immediate crisis intervention mechanisms for students in distress; and

(e) Reduce mental health stigma within school communities.

SEC. 4. *Comprehensive School Mental Health Program (CSMHP).* — The Department of Education (DepEd), in coordination with the Department of Health (DOH) and the National Mental Health Council, shall formulate and implement a Comprehensive School Mental Health Program (CSMHP) for all elementary and high schools, incorporating:

1. Prevention and Promotion: Mental health literacy integrated into class subjects, wellness activities, and anti-stigma campaigns.
2. Early Intervention & Threat Assessment: Routine screening, peer-support network training, anti-bullying integration, and early identification protocols for at-risk students exhibiting behavioral distress or radicalization signs.
3. Crisis Response & Emergency Intervention: Immediate counseling, psychological first aid, trauma response, and immediate referral systems for severe cases or violent threats.

SEC. 5. *Creation of School Mental Health Positions and Revised Salary Structure.*

(a) Salary Grade Upgrade: To attract and retain qualified professionals, the entry-level position of Guidance Counselor I (currently Salary Grade 11) is hereby upgraded to Salary Grade 16. Higher Guidance Counselor positions shall be adjusted accordingly.

(b) Mental Health Associates: To assist Guidance Counselors and bridge operational gaps, the position of School Mental Health Associate is hereby created under Salary Grade 13. Graduates of Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Social Work, or related behavioral sciences shall be eligible for this position.

(c) Staffing Ratios: The DepEd shall ensure that every public elementary and high school maintains a minimum ratio of one (1) Guidance Counselor or Mental Health Associate for every five hundred (500) students. Schools with large student populations shall establish a multidisciplinary School Mental Health Team.

SEC. 6. *Establishment of School Care Centers.* — Every public elementary and high school shall establish a dedicated, safe, and confidential space to be known as the "School Care Center." The Center shall serve as the primary hub for counseling, mental health consultations, peer-group processing, and psychological emergency response.

SEC. 7. *Capacity Building for School Personnel.* — DepEd shall mandate continuous training in Psychological First Aid (PFA), suicide and violence prevention, trauma-informed teaching, and early warning sign recognition for all teaching and non-teaching personnel. Teachers shall act as first responders in identifying distressed students but shall not replace certified professionals in delivering clinical interventions.

SEC. 8. *Parental and Community Engagement.* — Schools shall conduct mandatory orientation programs for parents and guardians to promote mental health literacy at home, emphasize parental involvement, and establish family support networks.

SEC. 9. *Confidentiality.* — All student records, counseling sessions, and psychological evaluations shall be strictly confidential, subject to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012) and Republic Act No. 11036 (Mental Health Act), except in emergency cases involving immediate risk of harm to the student or others.

SEC. 10. *Appropriations.* — The amount necessary for the immediate implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA) under the budget of the Department of Education.

SEC. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).* — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Education, in coordination with the Department of Health, the Department of Budget and Management, and relevant professional organizations, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for its effective implementation.

SEC. 12. *Separability Clause.* — If any provision or part of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 13. *Repealing Clause.* — All laws, executive orders, administrative orders, rules, and regulations inconsistent with or contrary to the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SEC. 14. *Effectivity.* — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,