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REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)



Senate
Office of the Secretary

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SENATE

S. No. 1796

RECEIVED BY: _____

Introduced by Senator MANUEL "LITO" M. LAPID

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects the way we think, feel, behave, and act. It is important since it impacts our decision making process and how we relate to others.

Mental health promotion and early intervention strategies may produce the greatest impact on people's health. It may allow for more effective healthcare pathways by acting on the problem before the same becomes worse. It minimizes the impact of any potentially serious health condition. Indeed, mental health promotion or early intervention in young people is an investment for the future.

The Philippine WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health revealed that at least 3.6 million Filipinos suffer from one kind of mental, neurological, and substance use disorder. In fact, in the Philippines, mental illness is the third most common disability. The Philippines even ranked third highest rate of mental health problems in the West Pacific Region. Despite the alarming state of mental health, the ratio of mental health workers per population in the Philippines is at 2-3 per 100,000 population. Sadly, we fail to recognize that poor mental health can interfere with one's ability to think clearly and make healthy decisions. We neglect the fact that being emotionally healthy can promote productivity and efficiency.

Mental health problems are very common among college students. This may be due to the fact that attending college corresponds to a challenging time for many traditional and non-traditional undergraduate students. Traditional college students start college after completing high school, are typically younger, depend on parents for financial support, and do not work or work part-time. Thus, in addition to stress related to academic load, these students may have to face the task of taking on more adult-like responsibilities without having yet mastered the skills and cognitive maturity of adulthood.¹

In recognition of the right of all Filipinos to mental health and giving particular attention to higher education students, this bill seeks to supplement Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the Mental Health Act, by creating 24/7 hotlines that would provide assistance to individuals with mental health conditions in colleges and universities. This bill likewise aims to strengthen the mental health services of state universities and colleges (SUCS) by creating Mental Health Offices in all SUCs.

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



MANUEL "LITO" M. LAPID
Senator

¹ Pedrelli, Paola, et. al. College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations (2014)
Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4527955/>

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1 **AN ACT**
2 **STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OF STATE**
3 **UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

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

4 Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the "State Universities and
5 Colleges (SUCs) Mental Health Service Act".

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

14 All SUCs shall ensure that proper and adequate mental health services are
15 provided to their students, faculty, non-teaching staff and other personnel. In this
16 regard, all SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall design programs and
17 provide services that shall assist students in resolving emotional, behavioral, and
18 psychosocial issues that are barriers to learning and enhance the preparedness of the

1 faculty, teaching, non-teaching staff, and other personnel to foster an enabling
2 environment for students to acquire knowledge and to develop intellectually.

3 Section 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

4 *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or
5 certification granted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at
6 the minimum a master’s degree in Guidance and Counseling, Guidance, or Counseling,
7 without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather’s clause of Republic Act
8 No. 9258, otherwise known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”, and is
9 component to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance and implement
10 mental health programs;

11 *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realized
12 one’s own abilities and potentials, copers adequately with the normal stresses of life,
13 displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully,
14 and is able to make a positive contribution to the community;

15 *Mental health professional* refers to a medical doctor, nurse, guidance
16 counselor, psychologist, or any other appropriately-trained and qualified person with
17 specific skills relevant to, and necessary for, the provision of mental health services;

18 *Mental health services* refer to the psychosocial, psychiatric, or neurologic
19 activities and programs along the whole range of the mental health support services
20 including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are provided by
21 mental health facilities and mental health professionals;

22 *Psychologist* refers to a natural person who has professional training and clinical
23 skills in psychotherapeutic intervention and assessment for mental health programs
24 and possesses a license or certification granted by the PRC and holds at the minimum
25 a master’s degree in Psychology without prejudice to those granted licenses under the
26 grandfather’s clause of Republic Act No. 10029, otherwise known as the “Philippine
27 Psychology Act of 2009”;

1 *SUCs-based mental health service personnel* refers to any mental health
2 professional who is hired or deployed by, or has a contract with an SUC to render
3 mental health services in its campus.

4 Section 4. *Establishment of Mental Health Offices in all SUCs Campuses.* – The
5 Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall, subject to the rules and regulations of
6 the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Department of Budget and Management
7 (DBM), and the policies, standards, and guidelines of the CHED, require all SUCs to
8 establish a Mental Health Office in all their campuses.

9 The Mental Health Offices shall set up campus hotlines using both traditional
10 telephone and online messaging applications with dedicated and trained guidance
11 counselors to provide assistance to the whole SUC Community, especially the students.
12 Special attention shall be given to those identified to have mental health problems or
13 conditions, especially those at risk of committing suicide.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as
16 the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", SUCs may hire, as may be necessary,
17 college graduates who do not yet qualify as mental health professionals but who
18 possess a background in psychology or similar fields to provide mental health services:
19 Provided, That the CHED shall provide for the appropriate training and instruction of
20 such college graduates in order for them to gain and develop the necessary skills to
21 render counselling services to faculty, students and school personnel, and assist them
22 in managing mental health issues: Provided, further, That such services shall be
23 rendered under the supervision of qualified mental health professionals within the
24 schools division: Provided, finally, That a college graduate hired to work in a Mental
25 Health Office shall, within three (3) years from the date of employment in the SUC,
26 secure the appropriate license to practice as a mental health professional and meet
27 the relevant qualification requirements of their position.

28 The CHED and the SUCs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall formulate a
29 scheme for the continuous training of mental health service personnel, taking into
30 consideration the latest scientific studies, psycho-social approaches and know-how on

1 mental health and mental health services, in accordance with the provisions of
2 Republic Act No. 10912, otherwise known as the "Continuing Professional
3 Development Act of 2016".

4 Section 6. *Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals.*

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

6 Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that shall include
7 provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, in-service
8 training, graduate scholarships, research grants, and incentive award system;

9 Match the salary grades of mental health professionals with related *plantilla*
10 items under the provisions of Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the
11 "Compensation and Position Classification Act of 1898," as amended;

12 Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental
13 Health Professionals to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10968, otherwise known as
14 the "Philippine Qualifications Framework Act";

15 Revisit the organizational structure of the SUCs to provide competent and
16 professional personnel who shall provide supervision and technical assistance to the
17 guidance counselors;

18 Review, revise and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health
19 professionals in accordance with laws governing their professions;

20 Prepare a performance evaluation plan that considers the improvement of the
21 efficiency and organizational effectiveness of each counselor: Provided, That each
22 employee shall be informed regularly by their immediate supervisor of the evaluation
23 of their performance; and

24 Provide periodic training, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of mental
25 health professionals.

26 Section 7. *Salary Scale.* – The career and salary scales of mental health
27 professionals in SUCs shall provide for a gradual progression from a minimum to a

1 maximum salary by means of regular increments, to be given regularly based on merit
2 and competencies.

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

6 Section 8. *Contractual Hiring of Mental Health Personnel.* – In case of a scarcity
7 of mental health professionals who are available to work on a full-time basis in a
8 Mental Health Office, the concerned SUC may hire qualified professionals on a
9 contractual or part-time basis, subject to the evaluation and approval of the DBM.

10 Section 9. *Benefits.* – All mental health professionals employed in the various
11 Mental Health Offices shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and other benefits provided
12 in Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of Public Health
13 Workers”, Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, and
14 other pertinent laws.

15 Section 10. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions
16 of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

17 Section 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from
18 the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the Philippine
19 Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other concerned stakeholders, issue
20 rules and regulations to govern the hiring, training, and deployment guidance
21 counselors, psychologists, and other mental health service personnel in SUCs, and for
22 the implementation of this Act.

23 Section 12. *Suppletory Application.* – The applicable provisions of Republic Act
24 No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, insofar as they are not
25 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, shall apply suppletorily.

26 Section 13. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees,
27 rules and regulations and other issuances contrary to or inconsistent with this Act shall
28 be deemed repealed or modified accordingly.

1 Section 14. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is subsequently
2 declared invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions hereof which are not affected
3 thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

4 Section 15. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days from the
5 date of publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

6 *Approved,*