

NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)



'22 DEC 20 P1 51

SENATE
S. No. 1630

RECEIVED BY

Introduced by SENATOR RAMON BONG REVILLA, JR.

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that *"mental health is critically important to everyone, everywhere."* Despite the relatively high need for related services, there is a noted insufficient and inadequate available services. In its 2022 report, *"The World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All"*, it was underscored that global threats, including social and economic inequalities, violence and public health emergencies, to mental health are ever present nowadays.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution, under Article II, Section 15 provides that, *"The State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them."* In Republic Act 11036, otherwise known as the *"Mental Health Act"*, the state affirms the basic right of all Filipinos to mental health, as well as the fundamental rights of the people who require mental health services.

In 2020, the Department of Health (DOH) reported that at least 3.6 million Filipinos were found to have mental conditions, based on the national prevalence study on mental, neurological and substance use disorders. A number of research has indicated how these have been exacerbated by the sudden closure of schools and the abrupt shift to online learning, among others. Almost one in five Filipino youth aged 15-24 have ever considered ending their life, according to the 2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFSS) by the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) and funded by the DOH.

This bill seeks to strengthen the mental health services in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) by establishing a Mental Health Office with sufficiently trained professionals and staff.

This bill is cognizant of the lack of mental health professionals in the country, hence the bill proposes institutionalizing career development for mental health professionals by enhancing the available benefits.

In view of making mental health services directly available to the tertiary level students, the immediate passage of this bill is highly recommended.


RAMON BONG REVILLA, JR.


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

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

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

13 In this regard, all SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall design
14 programs and provide service that shall assist students in resolving emotional,
15 behavioral and psychological issues that are barriers to learning and enhance the
16 preparedness of the faculty, teaching, non-teaching staff, and other personnel to
17 foster an enabling environment for students to acquire knowledge and to develop
18 intellectually.

1 Sec. 3. *Definition of Terms.* - As used in this Act:

2 a. *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or
3 certification granted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at
4 the minimum a Master's Degree in Guidance and Counseling, Guidance, or Counseling
5 without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act
6 No. 9258, otherwise known as the "*Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004*," and is
7 competent to perform guidance and counselling, career guidance and implement
8 mental health programs;

9 b. *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes
10 one's own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life,
11 displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully,
12 and is able to make a positive contribution to the community;

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

16 d. *Mental health services* refers to the psychological, psychiatric or neurologic
17 activities and programs along the whole range of the mental health support services
18 including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are provided by
19 mental health facilities and mental health professionals;

20 e. *Psychologist* refers to a natural person who has professional training and clinical
21 skills in psychotherapeutic intervention and assessment for mental health problems
22 and possesses a license or certification granted by the PRC and holds at the minimum
23 a Master's degree in Psychology without prejudice to those granted licenses under the
24 grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 10029, otherwise known as the "*Psychology*
25 *Act of 2009*";

26 f. *SUCs-based mental health service personnel* refers to any mental health
27 professional who is hired or deployed by, or has a contract with, a SUC to render
28 mental health services in each campus of the SUC.

29 Sec. 4. *Establishment of Mental Health Offices (MHO) in All SUCs Campuses.* -

30 The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall, subject to the rules and
31 regulations of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), and the Department of Budget and

1 Management (DBM), and the policies, standards, and guidelines of the CHED, require
2 all SUCs to establish a Mental Health Office (MHO) in all their campuses. The MHO
3 shall set up campus hotlines with dedicated and trained guidance counselors to
4 provide assistance to the whole SUC Community, especially the students. Special
5 attention shall be given to those identified to have mental health problems or
6 conditions, especially those at risk of committing suicide. The CHED and the SUCs,
7 through their MHOs, shall initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the
8 collective consciousness about mental health. The awareness campaign shall give
9 special emphasis to the issues of suicide prevention, stress handling, mental health
10 and nutrition, and guidance and counselling. The campaign shall ensure that the whole
11 SUC community, especially the students, is aware of in-campus mental health
12 services.

13 The SUCs, through the MHOs, shall develop and provide for sufficient allocation
14 for mental health programs and projects designed to maintain and address the mental
15 health and well-being of the faculty, students, and personnel of the SUCs. Each MHO
16 shall be staffed by trained mental health professionals who shall serve as the mental
17 health service personnel of the SUCs. The SUCs-based mental health service personnel
18 of the MHOs, including those who shall be hired upon the effectivity of this Act, shall
19 create a mechanism for timely crisis intervention and suicide prevention and the
20 appropriate response strategies for the whole SUCs community, especially the
21 students.

22 The CHED shall, in coordination with the SUCs, establish mechanisms to
23 maximize existing services offered by other executive departments such as the
24 attached agencies to the Department of Health (DOH) dealing with mental health, and
25 the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

26 *Sec. 5. Hiring, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals. -*
27 Subject to the guidelines set by the CHED, Civil Service Commission (CSC),
28 Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the SUCs, the SUCs shall hire,
29 train and deploy mental health professionals, including a psychologist, to the MHO to
30 ensure that each SUC shall have mental health professionals or mental health service
31 providers within five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act. The SUCs shall, in

1 coordination with the CHED, prepare the appropriate *plantilla* positions for the
2 additional SUC-based mental health service personnel to be hired under this Act,
3 subject to the existing organizational, staffing, position classification and
4 compensation policies, rules and regulations to be submitted to the DBM for evaluation
5 and approval. Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise
6 known as the "*Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004*," the SUCs may hire, as may be
7 necessary, graduates with relevant background in psychology or similar fields, who do
8 not yet qualify as mental health professionals to provide SUCs-based mental health
9 services: *Provided*, That they undergo sufficient capacity building as determined by
10 the CHED and are supervised by qualified mental health professionals in their provision
11 of mental health services: *Provided*, further, That they meet the relevant
12 qualifications and are licensed as mental health professionals within three (3) years
13 from their date of hiring. The CHED and the SUCs, through the MHOs, shall formulate
14 a scheme for the continuous training of mental health service personnel, taking into
15 consideration the latest information, studies and know-how on mental health and
16 mental health services, in accordance with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10912,
17 otherwise known as the "*Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016*."

18 Sec. 6. *Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals.* -
19 The CHED, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH and the PRC, shall:

- 20 a. Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that shall include
21 provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, in service
22 training, graduate scholarships, research grants, and incentive award system;
- 23 b. Match the salary grades of mental health professionals with related *plantilla*
24 items under the provisions of Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the "*Position*
25 *Classification and Compensation Act of 1989*," as amended;
- 26 c. Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental
27 Health Professionals to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10968, otherwise known as
28 the "*Philippine Qualifications Framework Act*";
- 29 d. Revisit the organizational structure of the SUCs to provide competent and
30 professional personnel who shall provide supervision and technical assistance to the
31 guidance counselors;

- 1 e. Review, revise, and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health
2 professionals in accordance with laws governing their professions;
- 3 f. Prepare a performance evaluation plan that considers the improvement of the
4 efficiency and organizational effectiveness of each counselor: *Provided*, That each
5 employee shall be informed regularly by the immediate supervisor of one's
6 performance evaluation; and
- 7 g. Provide periodic training, retooling and skills upgrading to mental health
8 professionals.

9 *Sec. 7. Salary Grade.* - The career and salary scales of mental health
10 professionals in SUCs shall provide for a gradual progression from a minimum to a
11 maximum salary by means of regular increments, to be given regularly based on merit
12 and competencies. The entry level of mental health professionals shall not be lower
13 than Salary Grade 16. Psychometricians shall have, as entry level, Salary Grade 11.

14 *Sec. 8. Contract with SUCs-based Mental Health Personnel.* - In case of scarcity
15 of available mental health service personnel for full time employment in the MHO of
16 the SUCs, the SUCs may enter into agreements for their hiring on a contractual or
17 part-time basis in the campuses of the SUCs.

18 *Sec. 9. Benefits.* - The Mental Health Professionals in the MHOs shall enjoy the
19 rights, privileges, and other benefits provided in Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise
20 known as the "*Magna Carta of Public Health Workers*," Republic Act No. 11036,
21 otherwise known as the "*Mental Health Act*" and other pertinent laws.

22 *Sec. 10. Appropriations.* - The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of
23 this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

24 *Sec. 11. Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).* - Within sixty (60) days
25 after the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the
26 Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other concerned
27 stakeholders, issue the rules and regulations necessary for the hiring, training, and
28 deployment of the SUCs-based guidance counselors, psychologists and other mental
29 health service personnel, and for the implementation of this Act.

1 Sec 12. *Suppletory Application.* - The applicable provisions of Republic Act No.
2 11036, otherwise known as the "*Mental Health Act*," insofar as they are not
3 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, shall apply as suppletory.

4 Sec. 13. *Separability Clause.* - If any part or provision of this Act shall be
5 declared invalid or unconstitutional, the other provisions hereof not affected shall
6 continue to be in full force and effect.

7 Sec. 14. *Repealing Clause.* - Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive
8 order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule, or regulation contrary to or
9 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified, or amended
10 accordingly.

11 Sec. 15. *Effectivity.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
12 publication either in the *Official Gazette* or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation
13 in the Philippines.

Approved,