

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

23 JAN 26 AM 11:49

SENATE
S. No. 1786

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Christopher Lawrence "Bong" T. Go

AN ACT
MANDATING PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN
THEIR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Mental health disorders are often overlooked, with many failing to recognize the signs and symptoms. This has been a major problem for every individual especially to students. Formal psychological help-seeking behavior is estimated at only 22.17% among Filipinos, and inaccessibility of mental health and wellness services and facilities is one of the main contributing factors.¹ Reported suicide rates in the Philippines have been increasing over the past several decades, particularly among young people, with the latest estimate in 2015 indicating 17% of young people aged 13–15 having attempted suicide.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has put Filipino youth's mental health and well-being under immense strain. Currently, there is still a lack of unified and comprehensive strategies in place to protect students from the effects of their demanding learning activities.

¹ Martinez, A.B., Co, M., Lau, J. et al. Filipino help-seeking for mental health problems and associated barriers and facilitators: a systematic review. *Soc Psychiatry Epidemiol* 55. 1397-1413 (2020).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-020-01937-2>

² Prevention and Management of Mental health Conditions in the Philippines: The Case for Investment.
<https://www.undp.org/philippines/publications/prevention-and-management-mental-health-conditions-philippines-case-investment>

This proposed measure strengthens the mental health services of public universities and colleges by the establishment of a Mental Health Office in all public higher education institutions (HEIs), and the hiring, deployment, and training of additional HEI-based mental health service personnel. The CHED and the public HEIs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the collective consciousness about mental health.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bong T. Go', written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE "BONG" T. GO

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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 “Public Higher
2 Education Institutions Mental Health Offices Act of 2023”.

3
4 **Sec. 2. Declaration of Policy.** –Pursuant to the policy of the State to protect
5 and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among
6 them, and in accordance with the mandate of educational institutions to raise
7 awareness on mental health issues, identify and provide support and services for
8 individuals at risk, and facility access, the State shall institute mechanisms to further
9 empower educational institutions in promoting the mental health and wellness of
10 students, faculty, teaching and non-teaching staff, and other personnel in public
11 higher education institutions.

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

13
14 (a) *College-based mental health service personnel* refers to any mental health
15 professional who is hired or deployed by, or has a contract with a higher education
16 institution to render mental health services in its campus;

17
18 (b) *Guidance counselor* refers to an individual who possesses a license or certification
19 granted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and holds at the
20 minimum a master’s degree in Guidance and Counseling, Guidance, or Counseling,
21 without prejudice to those registered under the grandfather’s clause of Republic
22 Act No. 9258, otherwise known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”, and

1 of 2004", and is competent to perform guidance and counseling, career guidance
2 and implement mental health programs;

3
4 (c) *Mental health* refers to a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one's
5 own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life,
6 displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and
7 fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution to the community;

8
9 (d) *Mental health professional* refers to a medical doctor, nurse, guidance counselor,
10 psychologist, or any other appropriately-trained and qualified person with specific
11 skills relevant to, and necessary for, the provision of mental health services;

12
13 (e) *Mental health services* refer to the psychosocial, psychiatric, or neurologic
14 activities and programs along the whole range of the mental health support
15 services including promotion, prevention, treatment, and aftercare, which are
16 provided by mental health facilities and mental health professionals;

17
18 (f) *Psychologist* refers to a natural person who has professional training and clinical
19 skills in psychotherapeutic intervention and assessment for mental health
20 problems and possesses a license or certification granted by the PRC and holds
21 at the minimum a master's degree in Psychology without prejudice to those
22 granted licenses under the grandfather's clause of Republic Act No. 10029,
23 otherwise known as the "Philippine Psychology Act of 2009"; and

24
25 (g) *Public Higher education institutions (HEIs)* refer to public post-secondary
26 education institutions, which include state and local universities and colleges,
27 TVET institutions and specialized public institutions that provide undergraduate
28 and graduate degree programs in such fields as law, theology, medicine,
29 business, music, and art, among others.

30
31 **Sec. 4.** Establishment of Mental Health Offices in All Public HEI Campuses. –
32 All Public HEIs shall establish a Mental Health Office in all their campuses subject to
33 the rules and regulations of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Department
34 of Budget and Management (DBM), and the policies, standards, and guidelines of
35 the CHED.

36
37 The Mental Health Offices shall set up campus hotlines with dedicated and
38 trained guidance counselors to provide assistance to the whole HEI community,
39 especially the students. Special attention shall be given to those identified to have
40 mental health problems or conditions, especially those at risk of committing suicide.

41
42 **Sec. 5.** Mental Health Programs in Public HEIs. - The CHED and the public
43 HEIs, through their Mental Health Offices, and in consultation with student
44 governments, shall initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the collective
45 consciousness about mental health. The awareness campaign shall give special
46 emphasis to the issues of suicide prevention, stress handling, mental health and
47 nutrition, and guidance and counseling. The campaign shall ensure that the whole

1 HEI community, especially the students, is aware of in-campus mental health
2 services.

3

4 The public HEIs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall implement mental
5 health programs and projects designed to promote the mental health and well-being
6 of faculty, students, and personnel alike. The CHED shall, in coordination with public
7 HEIs, establish mechanisms to maximize existing services offered by other executive
8 departments such as the attached agencies to the Department of Health (DOH)
9 dealing with mental health and the Department of Social Welfare and Development
10 (DSWD).

11

12 **Sec. 6. Mental Health Office Personnel.** - Each Mental Health Office shall be
13 manned by trained mental health professionals who shall serve as the mental health
14 service personnel of the HEIs.

15

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

20

21 **Sec. 7. Hiring, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals.** –
22 Subject to the guidelines set by the CHED and the HEI, CSC and DBM, the public HEI
23 shall hire, train and deploy mental health professionals, including a psychologist, to
24 the Mental Health Office to ensure that each HEI shall have mental health
25 professionals or mental health service providers.

26

27 The public HEI shall, in coordination with the CHED, prepare the appropriate
28 plantilla positions to be submitted to the DBM for evaluation and approval for the
29 additional HEI-based mental health service personnel to be hired under this Act,
30 subject to the existing organizational, staffing, position classification and
31 compensation policies, rules, and regulations.

32

33 Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, otherwise known as
34 the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", public HEIs may hire, as may be
35 necessary, college graduates who do not yet qualify as mental health professionals
36 but who possess a background in psychology or similar fields to provide mental
37 health services: Provided, That the CHED shall provide for the appropriate training
38 and instruction of such college graduates in order for them to gain and develop the
39 necessary skills to render counselling services to faculty, students and school
40 personnel, and assist them in managing mental health issues: Provided, further,
41 That such services shall be rendered under the supervision of qualified mental health
42 professionals within the schools division: Provided, finally, That a college graduate
43 hired to work in a Mental Health Office shall, within three (3) years from the date of
44 employment in the HEI, secure the appropriate license to practice as a mental health
45 professional and meet the relevant qualification requirements of their position.

46

47 The CHED and the public HEIs, through the Mental Health Offices, shall
48 formulate a scheme for the continuous training of mental health service personnel,

1 taking into consideration the latest scientific studies, psycho-social approaches and
2 know-how on mental health and mental health services, in accordance with the
3 provisions of Republic Act No. 10912, otherwise known as the "Continuing
4 Professional Development Act of 2016".

5
6 **Sec. 8.** Professional and Career Development of Mental Health Professionals.
7 – The CHED shall, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH and the PRC:

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

13
14 (b) Match the salary grades of mental health professionals with related plantilla
15 items under the provisions of Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the
16 "Compensation and Position Classification Act of 1989," as amended;

17
18 (c) Align the qualifications and standards for the qualification outcomes of Mental
19 Health Professionals to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10968, otherwise
20 known as the "Philippine Qualifications Framework Act";

21
22 (d) Revisit the organizational structure of the public HEIs to provide competent
23 and professional personnel who shall provide supervision and technical
24 assistance to the guidance counselors;

25
26 (e) Review, revise and develop the duties and responsibilities of mental health
27 professionals in accordance with laws governing their professions;

28
29 (f) Prepare a performance evaluation plan that considers the improvement of the
30 efficiency and organizational effectiveness of each counselor: Provided, That
31 each employee shall be informed regularly by their immediate supervisor of
32 the evaluation of their performance; and

33
34 (g) Provide periodic training, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of
35 mental health professionals.

36
37 **Sec. 9.** Contractual Hiring of Mental Health Personnel. – In case of a scarcity
38 of mental health professionals who are available to work on a full-time basis in a
39 Mental Health Office, the concerned HEI may hire qualified professionals on a
40 contractual or part-time basis, subject to the evaluation and approval of the DBM.

41
42 **Sec. 10.** Mental Health Offices in private HEIs. – Private HEIs shall endeavor
43 to establish their own Mental Health Offices, subject to guidelines to be provided by
44 CHED and DOH.

45
46 **Sec. 11.** Benefits. – All mental health professionals employed in the various
47 Mental Health Offices in public and private HEIs shall enjoy the rights, privileges,

1 and other benefits provided in Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known as the
2 "Magna Carta of Public Health Workers", Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known
3 as the "Mental Health Act", and other pertinent laws.

4
5 **Sec. 12.** Appropriations. – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions
6 of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act.

7
8 **Sec. 13.** Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within sixty (60) days from
9 the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DOH, the
10 Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other concerned
11 stakeholders, issue rules and regulations to govern the hiring, training and
12 deployment of guidance counselors, psychologists and other mental health service
13 personnel in SUCs, and for the implementation of this Act.

14
15 **Sec. 14.** Suppletory Application. – The applicable provisions of Republic Act
16 No. 11036, otherwise known as the "Mental Health Act", insofar as they are not
17 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, shall apply suppletorily.

18
19 **Sec. 15.** Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act is declared
20 unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected, shall remain
21 in full force and effect.

22
23 **Sec. 16.** Repealing Clause. – Any law, presidential decree or issuance,
24 executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary
25 to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is repealed, modified or amended
26 accordingly.

27
28 **Sec. 17.** Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its
29 publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,