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**SENATE**

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**SENATE BILL NO. 2598**

*Prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Health and Demography; and Finance with Senators Estrada, Revilla, Jr. Go, Lapid, Escudero and Angara as authors thereof.*

**AN ACT  
STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OF STATE  
UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND  
FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

*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 Services Act.”

3 Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policies.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State  
4 to uphold the basic right of every Filipino to sound mental health and ensure access  
5 to appropriate and needed interventions, therapy, and treatment. 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  
9 Office in all SUCs, and recruitment, deployment and training of additional SUC-based  
10 mental health service personnel.

11 All SUCs shall ensure the provision of proper and adequate mental health  
12 services to their respective students, faculty, non-teaching staff and other personnel.  
13 In this regard, all SUCs, through their Mental Health Offices, shall design programs  
14 and provide services to assist in the resolution of emotional, behavioral, and  
15 psychosocial issues and to foster an enabling environment for knowledge acquisition  
16 and intellectual development.

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

1 (a) *Guidance Counselor* shall refer to a natural person who has been  
2 registered and issued a valid Certificate of Registration and a valid Professional  
3 Identification Card by the Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling  
4 and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) in accordance with Republic Act  
5 No. 9258, otherwise known as the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004", and, by  
6 virtue of specialized training, performs the functions of guidance and counseling for  
7 a fee, salary or other forms of compensation: *Provided*, That this definition shall be  
8 without prejudice to those registered as guidance counselor pursuant to Section 14  
9 of Republic Act No. 9258;

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

14 (c) *Mental Health Professional* shall refer to a medical doctor, nurse,  
15 guidance counselor, psychologist, or any other appropriately-trained and qualified  
16 person with specific skills relevant to, and necessary for, the provision of mental  
17 health services;

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

22 (e) *Psychologist* shall refer to a natural person who is duly registered and  
23 holds a valid certificate of registration and a valid professional identification card as a  
24 professional psychologist, issued by the Professional Regulatory Board of Psychology  
25 and the PRC pursuant to Republic Act No. 10029, otherwise known as the "Philippine  
26 Psychology Act of 2009", for the purpose of delivering different psychological  
27 services: *Provided*, That this definition shall be without prejudice to those registered  
28 as psychologists pursuant to Section 16 of Republic Act No. 10029; and

29 f) *SUC-Based Mental Health Service Personnel* shall refer to any mental health  
30 professional who is hired or deployed by, or has a contract with an SUC to render  
31 mental health services in its campus.

1            *Sec. 4. Establishment of Mental Health Offices in All SUC Campuses.* – All  
2 SUCs shall be mandated to establish a Mental Health Office in their respective  
3 campuses to be operated by trained mental health professionals serving as the  
4 mental health service personnel of the SUCs: *Provided,* That the establishment and  
5 operation of mental health offices in SUC campuses shall be subject to the policies,  
6 standards and guidelines issued by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED),  
7 Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Civil Service Commission (CSC).

8            The Mental Health Offices in SUCs shall perform the following duties and  
9 functions:

10           (a) Implement mental health programs and projects designed to promote  
11 mental health and well-being of students, faculty, teaching and non-teaching staff,  
12 and other personnel employed in SUC campuses;

13           (b) Set up twenty-four seven (24/7) campus hotline numbers attended by  
14 dedicated and trained guidance counselors to provide assistance to the whole SUC  
15 Community, with special attention paid to the needs of students, individuals with  
16 history of mental health problems or conditions, and those who have higher risk  
17 factors for self-harm or suicide;

18           (c) Initiate and sustain a heightened campaign to raise the collective  
19 consciousness about mental health, with emphasis on preventing suicides, handling  
20 life stresses, promoting mental health and nutrition, and guidance and counseling;

21           (d) Create a mechanism for crisis intervention and response, particularly for  
22 cases involving suicide and other immediate or life-threatening emergencies;

23           (e) Establish systems to maximize the utilization of existing mental health  
24 services provided by other government agencies, such as, but not limited to:  
25 Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Welfare and  
26 Development (DSWD); and

27           (f) Perform other duties and functions in relation to mental health awareness  
28 and promotion as may be identified by CHED.

29           *Sec. 5. Recruitment, Training and Deployment of Mental Health Professionals*  
30 *in SUC Campuses.* — Within five (5) years from the effectivity of this Act, the SUCs  
31 shall ensure that their respective mental health offices are staffed with mental

1 health professionals. For this purpose, the SUCs shall, in coordination with CHED  
2 and subject to evaluation and approval of the DBM, formulate the appropriate  
3 organizational structure and staffing pattern for their respective mental health  
4 offices.

5 Notwithstanding the provisions of Republic Act No. 9258, SUCs shall be  
6 authorized to recruit individuals with undergraduate degrees in psychology or other  
7 related disciplines but lack other requisites to qualify as mental health professionals:  
8 *Provided, That the services rendered such individuals shall be performed under the*  
9 *supervision of qualified mental health professionals: Provided, further, That the*  
10 *CHED and the SUC concerned shall provide for the appropriate training, instruction*  
11 *and assistance to enable them to develop the necessary skills to render counselling*  
12 *and other mental health services to students, faculty, teaching and non-teaching*  
13 *staff, and other personnel employed in SUC campuses: Provided, finally, That*  
14 *individuals recruited without the required licenses or certification under this Act*  
15 *shall, within three (3) years from the date of recruitment, secure such licenses and*  
16 *certification required in the performance of the responsibilities as mental health*  
17 *professionals.*

18 *Sec. 6. Professional and Career Development Program for In-Campus Mental*  
19 *Health Professionals.* – In accordance with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10912,  
20 otherwise known as the “Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016”, the  
21 CHED shall formulate continuing professional development and training programs for  
22 SUC mental health personnel and shall ensure the adoption of the appropriate  
23 mental health interventions for students, faculty, teaching and non-teaching staff,  
24 and other personnel employed in SUC campuses.

25 The CHED shall, in coordination with the DBM, CSC, DOH, and PRC, perform  
26 the following:

27 (a) Prepare a uniform career and personnel development plan that includes  
28 provisions on personal wellness, merit promotion, performance evaluation, in-service  
29 training, graduate scholarships, research grants, and incentive award systems;

30 (b) Ensure that compensation of mental health professionals employed by  
31 SUCs are commensurate with other related plantilla items under the provisions of

1 Republic Act No. 6758, otherwise known as the "Compensation and Position  
2 Classification Act of 1989," as amended;

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

6 (d) Review the organizational structure of the SUCs to ensure the availability  
7 of competent and professional personnel that can supervise and provide technical  
8 assistance to the guidance counselors;

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

11 (f) Prepare a performance evaluation plan geared towards the improvement  
12 of the efficiency and effectiveness of each mental health professional: *Provided,*  
13 That the employees shall be adequately informed by their immediate supervisor of  
14 the evaluation of their performance; and

15 (g) Provide periodic training, aimed at retooling and upgrading the skills of  
16 mental health professionals.

17 *Sec. 7. Salary Scale.* – The career and salary scales of mental health  
18 professionals in SUCs shall provide for a progression from a minimum to a maximum  
19 salary by means of salary adjustments and/or regular increments, to be given based  
20 on necessity, merit and competencies: *Provided,* That the entry level for qualified  
21 mental health professionals employed by SUCs shall not be lower than Salary  
22 Grade 16.

23 *Sec. 8. Recruitment of Mental Health Personnel on a Contract-of-Service and*  
24 *Other Similar Work Arrangements.* – In cases where SUCs are unable to engage the  
25 services of qualified personnel for regular appointment, the SUC concerned shall be  
26 authorized to engage the services of mental health professionals under a contract-  
27 of-service and other similar work arrangements, whether full-time or part-time basis,  
28 subject to existing laws, rules and regulations.

29 *Sec. 9. Benefits.* – All mental health professionals employed in Mental Health  
30 Offices of the SUCs shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and other benefits provided in  
31 Republic Act No. 7305, otherwise known as the "Magna Carta of Public Health

1 Workers”, Republic Act No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, and  
2 other pertinent laws.

3 Sec. 10. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary to carry out the provisions  
4 of this Act shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act or sourced  
5 from the internally-generated income of the SUCs.

6 Sec. 11. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from  
7 the effectivity of this Act, the CHED shall, in coordination with the DBM, PRC, DOH,  
8 Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and other stakeholders  
9 concerned, promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively implement the  
10 provisions of this Act.

11 Sec. 12. *Suppletory Application.* – The applicable provisions of Republic Act  
12 No. 11036, otherwise known as the “Mental Health Act”, insofar as such provisions  
13 are not inconsistent with the provisions and objectives of this Act, shall apply  
14 suppletorily.

15 Sec. 13. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is declared  
16 unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected thereby  
17 shall remain in full force and effect.

18 Sec. 14. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, acts, decrees, executive orders,  
19 issuances, and rules and regulations or parts thereof which are contrary to and  
20 inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

21 Sec. 15. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect immediately following its  
22 publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,