

**TWENTIETH COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN
MARIANA ISLANDS YOUTH CONGRESS**

9TH REGULAR Session, 20 26

Y.C.B. No. 20- 07

A BILL FOR AN ACT

To require all schools in the CNMI to teach
mental health awareness and provide mental
health services; and for other purposes.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE TWENTIETH COMMONWEALTH OF THE
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS YOUTH CONGRESS:**

1 **Section 1. Short Title.** This Act shall be known as “The CNMI Youth
2 Mental Health Support Act of 2026”.

3 **Section 2. Finding and Purpose.** The Youth Congress finds that mental
4 health in the CNMI is an epidemic that goes largely unaddressed and untreated,
5 especially in the youth population. According to the 2017 CNMI Youth Risk
6 Behavior Survey sponsored by the Center for Disease Control, 40.7% of
7 adolescents reported being depressed, 25.0% reported suicide ideation, 22.8%
8 reported formulating a suicide plan, and 13.6% attempted suicide. Findings showed
9 that female adolescents were more likely to report feeling depressed and suicidal
10 behavior. Moreover, according to a report by the Substance Abuse and Mental
11 Health Services Administration in 2019, 60% of the 3.8 million adolescents ages
12 12-17 who reported a major depressive episode did not receive any treatment.

1 These alarmingly high rates are linked to a multitude of preventable risk
2 factors, including bullying, victimization, substance abuse, and sexual activity. It is
3 crucial that these risk factors are identified and addressed early in adolescence to
4 prevent deleterious effects from untreated mental illness. Schools are ideal places
5 to identify and address these risk factors, as well as to teach awareness and provide
6 mental and behavioral services. Studies have shown that students are more likely
7 to seek help when services are provided in schools. Currently, schools in the CNMI
8 lack mental health awareness and students do not have immediate access to
9 necessary resources and services.

10 It is imperative that measures be enacted to curb this rising trend of
11 depression and suicidal behavior, and to preserve and ensure the mental wellbeing
12 of the youth. It is therefore the intent of the Youth Congress to require all schools
13 within the CNMI: public and private, elementary, middle and high schools to teach
14 mental health awareness and provide mental health services.

15 **Section 3. Enactment.** Subject to codification by the CNMI Law Revision
16 Commission, the following provision shall hereby be enacted:

17 **§101. Mental Health Awareness Requirements**

18 (a) Schools must include mental health awareness in their health course
19 curriculum. One semester of mental health awareness will be required
20 for high school students to graduate, and for middle school students to
21 promote.

1 (b) Health teachers shall be qualified to teach at the level in which they
2 are assigned, and shall have certification in mental health literacy.

3 (c) All teachers shall undergo base level mental health literacy training.

4 (d) Schools shall implement mental health awareness within their
5 curriculum by School Year 2027-2028.

6 (A) Mental Health Services Requirements

7 (a) Mental health services shall include individual, group, and family
8 therapy, crisis counseling, mental health screenings and assessment,
9 substance abuse counseling and prevention, and advanced care referral.

10 (b) Schools shall be required to employ qualified mental health
11 specialists, including but not limited to: professional counselors, clinical
12 social workers, school-based psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychiatric
13 and/or mental health nurses.

14 (c) Services shall be available to all students and accessible at all times.
15 Base level care shall be free of charge.

16 (d) Schools shall provide mental health services by SY 2028-29.

17 **Section 4. Severability.** If any provision of this Act or the application of
18 any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court
19 of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its
20 provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid
21 shall not be affected thereby.

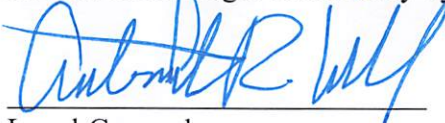
1 **Section 5. Savings Clause.** This Act and any repealer contained herein shall
2 not be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or acquired
3 under statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted under the
4 statutes. Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding instituted
5 under or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have the effect
6 of terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal, which shall
7 already be in existence on the date this Act becomes effective.

8 **Section 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect upon its approval by
9 the Governor or becoming law without such approval.

Prefiled: _____

Date: _____ Introduced by: _____
Senator Edward U. Maratita III

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency by:



Legal Counsel