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"Like twined cords we are stronger, Together we shall conquer!"

Position Paper submitted by the
Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA) and
Philippine Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (PSCAP):
School Safety Act

Senate Committee on Basic Education
Chairperson: Sen. Bam Aquino

July 16, 2026

I. Introduction

The Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA) and the Philippine Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (PSCAP) express gratitude to the Senate Committee on Basic Education for inviting us to serve as resource organizations in the deliberations on the proposed *School Safety Act*.

We welcome the opportunity to provide psychiatric, psychosocial, and developmental insights, clinical recommendations, and holistic perspectives on Senate Bills 441, 1582, 627, 1052, 1077, 1376, 2133, and related legislative inquiries into school violence. These measures are not merely administrative safeguards but crucial interventions in the developmental trajectory of Filipino children.

Recent incidents of school violence, including the Tacloban 2026 shooting and stabbing cases in Metro Manila, underscore the urgent need for systemic safeguards. These events highlight how unchecked aggression, digital exposure, and gaps in psychosocial support converge to place Filipino students at risk (UNESCO, 2019; WHO, 2023).

II. Core Principle: Biopsychosocialspiritual Approach and Parenting as the First Line of Defense

Human behavior is complex and multi-determined. Manifestations of school violence, cyber-aggression, and bullying cannot be addressed by punitive policies alone. The PPA and PSCAP advocate for anchoring interventions in the **biopsychosocialspiritual model**, which considers:

- **Biological:** Neurodevelopmental factors, trauma histories, sleep hygiene, and the physiological impact of excessive digital exposure.
- **Psychological:** Emotional regulation, self-esteem vulnerabilities, coping mechanisms.
- **Social:** Peer dynamics, systemic school cultures, socioeconomic stressors, and family environments.
- **Spiritual:** Purpose, empathy, connectedness, and respect for human dignity.

While schools serve as the secondary ecosystem for a child, the foundational architecture of behavior is constructed within the household**. Parenting is the primary line of defense** against maladaptive behaviors. Good manners and right conduct (GMRC), empathy, respect for boundaries, and accountability are lessons first absorbed at home (UNESCO, 2019).

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Legislation under the "School Safety Act" must therefore include provisions that:

- **Engage and empower parents** through education programs in Filipino and regional languages.
- **Highlight shared responsibility** between families, schools, and communities in preventing bullying and digital risks.
- **Support values formation at home** as a complement to school-based interventions.

The PSCAP complements this principle by recommending a *whole-education approach* to bullying prevention, integrating teacher training, age-appropriate curriculum modules, confidential reporting mechanisms, referral services, and collaboration with community stakeholders.

These perspectives affirm that parenting, family engagement, and values formation must stand as co-equal pillars of school safety, reinforced by school-based education and community collaboration.

III. Anti-Bullying Act Amendments (SB 441, SB 1582, Privilege Speech of Sen. Erwin Tulfo)
SB 441 (Sen. Raffy Tulfo) expands RA 10627 to include cyberbullying, CCTV installation, preventive suspension, and parental civil liability. **SB 1582 (Sen. Risa Hontiveros)** broadens coverage to explicitly recognize **abuse or bullying perpetrated by school personnel against students**, adding due process requirements. Sen. Erwin Tulfo's privilege speech (March 10, 2026) highlighted gaps in accountability, cyberbullying, counselor shortages, and the absence of a national data system (UNESCO, 2019).

The PPA and PSCAP support the expansion to cover **cyberbullying** and to explicitly address bullying or abuse by school employees, ensuring accountability within the school system and protecting learners from power imbalances that arise when authority figures misuse their position. However, punitive provisions such as parental civil liability and preventive suspension must be approached with caution.

Recommendations:

- Mandate **mental health assessment and management** for both the bully and the bullied.
- Provide **structured support systems** including counseling, peer mediation, and trauma-informed interventions.
- Require **close coordination with families**, ensuring parents are engaged in recovery and behavioral management.
- Adopt a whole-education approach to anti-bullying implementation, encompassing training and support for teachers; integration of age-appropriate anti-bullying education and awareness into the school curriculum; confidential and safe reporting mechanisms; establishment of referral services; a safe physical school environment; and collaboration with other community stakeholders

These measures affirm that anti-bullying enforcement must be paired with prevention, referral, and rehabilitation, ensuring that discipline is balanced with support and recovery.

IV. Digital Literacy, Internet Safety, and Responsible Technology Use (SB 627, SB 1052, SB 1077, SB 1376)
SB 627 (Sen. Win Gatchalian) prohibits gadget use during class hours. **SB 1052 (Sen. Jinggoy Estrada)** integrates responsible social media use in schools. **SB 1077 (Sen. Jinggoy Estrada)** establishes internet safety education programs. **SB 1376 (Sen. JV Ejercito)** mandates digital literacy in curricula with funding support.

PISA 2022 shows device distraction correlates with lower academic performance (−9.3 math, −12.2 science, −15.04 reading). Heavy social media use (>3 hours/day) doubles risk of depression and anxiety (WHO, 2023; UK Parliament, 2023; European Union, 2022).

Recommendations:

- Adopt **regulated use policies** rather than blanket bans.
- Embed **internet safety education** into curricula, with age-appropriate modules on privacy, digital citizenship, and responsible use.
- Follow **screen time guidance** (WHO, American Academy of Pediatrics: 1 hour/day ages 6–12 and 2 hours/day adolescents).
- Require schools to conduct **digital risk assessments** as part of guidance counseling, asking about online activities to detect risks early.
- Ensure compliance with the **Data Privacy Act (RA 10173)** — only essential data collected, with parental consent, and protected under confidentiality rules.
- Pair school-based digital literacy instruction with parent education programs, so that responsible technology use is reinforced consistently both in the classroom and at home.

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V. Student Guidance Counseling Act (SB 2133)
SB 2133 (Sen. Mark Villar) mandates the recruitment, hiring, and training of school-based licensed guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, and mental health personnel.

The Philippines currently has a counselor-to-student ratio of ~1:14,000, far from the global standard of 1:250. Increasing personnel is crucial, but quality must be prioritized to ensure effective and ethical practice.

Recommendations:

- Require PRC-licensed guidance counselors, psychologists, and social workers, ensuring competency and ethical practice.
- Establish quality assurance mechanisms: credential verification, supervision, and continuing education.
- Align with both international and local models:
    - **ASCA National Model (USA)**: Developed by the American School Counselor Association, this framework emphasizes comprehensive school counseling programs and structured professional development.
    - **OECD recommendations**: From the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, these emphasize multidisciplinary psychosocial support systems in schools, integrating mental health promotion with academic success.
    - **DepEd/CHED frameworks (Philippines)**: Guidance and values education integrated into curricula, with clear referral pathways to licensed mental health professionals.
- Structure school-based mental health and guidance counseling services to provide early identification, timely intervention, and appropriate referral pathways for students.
- Adopt a **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)** framework in school mental health programs, encompassing universal mental health promotion, early intervention for at-risk students, and targeted intervention for students with identified mental health needs.
- Position the Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA) and Philippine Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (PSCAP) as resource partners to DepEd and CHED in harmonizing training with international best practices and Philippine mental health standards.

VI. Summary of Recommendations

- Ground implementation in the **biopsychosocialspiritual model** of youth behavior.
- Treat **parenting, family engagement, and values formation** as co-equal pillars of school safety.
- Anchor reforms in the principle that safety is a shared responsibility across families, schools, communities, and platforms.
- Shift emphasis toward proactive prevention and mental health promotion, rather than discipline alone.
- Strengthen the Anti-Bullying Act through a **whole-education approach**: teacher training, curriculum integration, confidential reporting mechanisms, referral services, safe physical environments, and collaboration with community stakeholders.
- Pair disciplinary and surveillance provisions with **rehabilitation, intervention, and family support**, ensuring due process and privacy safeguards.
- Harmonize digital literacy, internet safety, and social media responsibility measures, and reinforce them through **parent education programs** for consistent application at home.
- Support the passage and funding of **SB 2133** to address the counselor shortage, ensuring both quantity and quality of school-based personnel.
- Structure school-based mental health services around early identification, timely intervention, and referral pathways, using a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework.

VII. Conclusion
The Philippine Psychiatric Association and the Philippine Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommend that the Senate adopt a balanced, evidence-anchored approach to school safety and online child protection. Legislation must expand coverage while ensuring the **quality, credibility, and sustainability** of mental health and guidance services.

Safety is a shared responsibility. Parents, schools, communities, platforms, and clinicians must work together to safeguard the dignity and well-being of Filipino children.

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Appendix: Legislative Measures Under the "School Safety Act"

- **SB 441 (Tulfo):** Expands RA 10627 to include cyberbullying, CCTV, preventive suspension, parental civil liability.
- **SB 1582 (Hontiveros):** Expands RA 10627 to cover bullying by school employees; adds due process safeguards.
- **Privilege Speech (Erwin Tulfo, March 10, 2026):** Highlights gaps in accountability, cyberbullying, counselor shortages, lack of national data system.
- **SB 627 (Gatchalian):** Prohibits gadget use during class hours (K–12).
- **SB 1052 (Estrada):** Mandates responsible social media use education.
- **SB 1077 (Estrada):** Establishes internet safety education programs in schools.
- **SB 1376 (Ejercito):** Requires digital literacy education in curricula, with funding.
- **SB 2133 (Villar):** Mandates recruitment, hiring, and training of PRC-licensed guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers

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