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

Position Statement submitted by the
Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA):

Online Gaming, Social Media, and the Safety of Filipino Children and Adolescents - A Mental Health Perspective on Risks, Accountability, and Responsive Policy

Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality
Chairperson: Sen. Risa Hontiveros

June 24, 2026

I. Introduction

The Philippine Psychiatric Association (PPA) provides technical input on two urgent national concerns: the misuse of online gaming platforms for child exploitation, grooming, and violent radicalization; and the June 22, 2026 school shooting at San Jose National High School in Tacloban City, Leyte. Our perspective draws from psychiatric research, neurodevelopmental science, and ongoing clinical work with Filipino children and families.

II. Online Gaming and Child Safety

Gaming itself is not the problem. With limits and adult guidance, it can encourage creativity and connection. The danger lies in unregulated platforms. Predators use chat, gifting, and private messaging to reach children, often disguising grooming as ordinary play. Vulnerable children, those isolated, bullied, or untreated for mental health conditions, are at greatest risk.

Recommendations:

- Platforms should require real age checks, not just tick-boxes. Privacy and communication restrictions must be the default for minors, with changes allowed only through verified adult consent.
- Companies must face enforceable penalties when they fail to protect children.
- Parents need practical tools in Filipino and regional languages.
- Parents and schools should teach children how to recognize grooming, assert boundaries, and seek help.

Shared responsibility: Parents monitor use. Schools and barangays reinforce vigilance. Communities act quickly when risks appear.

III. Social Media Access

Children under 13 are already online, despite platform rules. Heavy use, more than three hours a day, doubles the risk of depression, anxiety, and poor self-image. Social media can connect young people who feel alone, but safeguards must match their stage of development. Around the world, countries are raising the minimum age of access. The Philippines must follow suit.

Recommendations:

- Set a clear minimum age for unrestricted access. Require parental consent and default safeguards for younger teens.
- Platforms must enforce privacy-preserving age verification.
- Schools should teach digital literacy early, focusing on privacy, critical thinking, and help-seeking.

Shared responsibility: Parents, schools, and communities guide online behavior, reinforce safe practices, and ensure safeguards stay in place. Restrictions alone won't work; without education, children simply move to riskier spaces.

IV. Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR)

The Tacloban school shooting was a tragedy that demands accountability. But lowering the MACR will not necessarily prevent future violence. Neuroscience shows adolescents' brains are still developing. Impulse control and judgment remain incomplete, especially between ages 12 and 15. Detention often worsens trauma and increases the chance of reoffending.

Recommendations:

- Fully implement RA 9344 with diversion and rehabilitation programs.
- Provide mandatory mental health screening and services for children in conflict with the law.
- Address root causes: bullying, isolation, untreated conditions, firearm access, and extremist exposure.
- Review firearm storage in households with minors.
- Deliver trauma-informed support for schools and communities affected by violence.

Shared responsibility: Parents secure firearms. Communities provide early intervention. Schools and health systems respond quickly when risks surface.

V. Conclusion

Filipino children face real risks, from grooming and exploitation online to preventable violence in schools.

Protecting them requires a systems approach:

- Platforms held to enforceable standards
- Parents and communities accountable for guidance and vigilance
- Schools equipped to be safe and trauma-informed
- Mental health services accessible at every stage.
- Legislation must be anchored in evidence, not in the impulse to punish.

The PPA stands ready to work with government, educators, health professionals, and communities to safeguard Filipino children and adolescents.

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