



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Senator Anthony J. Portantino  
State Capitol, Room 5050  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: STRONG SUPPORT - Senate Bill 224 (SB 224) – Pupil instruction: mental health education

Dear Senator Portantino,

This letter is on behalf of the California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN). CAYEN is a Transitional Age Youth (TAY) (ages 15-26) program of Mental Health America of California. CAYEN is led by youth, for youth. CAEYN strongly supports SB 224, a bill that would ensure that California students receive crucial mental health education. CAYEN members have personally experienced mental health challenges which are often exasperated by a lack of access to mental health education and resources. California is experiencing a mental health crisis among youth and now more than ever are substantial investments in student mental health needed.

Children and youth are experiencing escalating mental health needs, and face numerous barriers to accessing care and support. According to the most recent [Commonwealth Fund Scorecard](#) on State Health System Performance, California ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation for providing children with needed mental health care. Early data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating children's mental health needs. For example, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reported that beginning in April 2020, the proportion of mental-health related emergency department visits among all pediatric emergency department visits increased by 24% for children ages 5-11 and by 31% for children ages 12-17. California needs to be doing everything in its power to support the mental health of its youth, especially now. By integrating mental health education into the classroom, knowledge of mental health and potential resources are made available to students, allowing them to recognize the signs of mental illness in themselves and their peers and get connected to mental health resources and support.

[www.CA-YEN.org](http://www.CA-YEN.org)

Now more than ever, it is critical that California equip all of its students with the information and tools necessary to promote positive mental health, and to seek mental health support and treatment when needed. SB 224 will ensure that students receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least once during elementary school, once during middle school, and once during high school. This education will help increase awareness, empower students to seek support, and reduce the stigma associated with experiencing mental health challenges.

CAYEN is proud to support and co-sponsor SB 224. Please know CAYEN is a resource available to you on any bill pertaining to youth mental health.

Sincerely,

*Zofia Trexler*

Zofia Trexler  
Board President  
California Youth Empowerment Network



Heidi Strunk  
President & CEO  
Mental Health America of California