



CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AGENCIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 10/13/2021

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES CONTACT: Sage Miller, Communications & Public Relations Specialist at smiller@cccbha.org

Coalition Applauds Governor Newsom for Signing SB 14 and Bringing Mental Health Training and Excused Mental Health Absences to Schools

Sacramento, Calif. - On Friday, Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 14 (Portantino) into law, broadening the definition of excused student absences to include an absence for the benefit of behavioral health of the student, with parity to physical excused absences. The bill also recommends that the California Department of Education identify youth behavioral health training that will equip school personnel and students with skills to recognize the signs and symptoms of behavioral health disorders (mental health and substance use disorders), provide knowledge of local resources and services, safely de-escalate crisis situations involving individuals with a mental health challenge, and reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behavior.

This law comes at a crucial time for our state, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate our youth mental health crisis. According to Mental Health America's 2020 Young People's Mental Health Report, high school students (ages 14-18) identified mental health excused absences as one of the top three things that would be most helpful for their mental health. Additionally, several other states including Oregon, Colorado, Maine, Utah, Connecticut, and Virginia have passed legislation permitting excused absences for mental/behavioral health.

SB 14 was sponsored by a broad coalition led by the [California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies \(CBHA\)](#), [GENUp](#), [County Behavioral Health Directors Association](#), [Born This Way Foundation](#), [California Student Board Member Association](#), [NextGen California](#), [Disability Rights CA](#), [California Association of Student Councils](#), [Inseparable](#), and supported by the [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#).

"I am very thankful to Governor Newsom for signing SB 14 into law and recognizing the urgency of implementing policies that give our kids the support they need," said Senator Anthony Portantino, the author of SB 14. "SB 14 is an important step forward to destigmatize mental health and increase access to care. California is in the midst of a youth behavioral health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Behavioral health education and training is one of the best ways to increase awareness and empower students to seek help. We must continue to work on this issue to support California's students."

"The California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA) and our coalition partners applaud Governor Newsom for signing SB 14 authored by Senator Portantino," said Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey, CBHA's Chief Executive Officer. "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, youth behavioral health needs to be a primary focus to protect and promote the well-being of our students. The work is far from done. Youth are dying, and educators and other school employees need the tools to



CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AGENCIES

recognize and deescalate crises and make appropriate referrals to care. CBHA has been carrying the torch on implementing evidence based and culturally sensitive behavioral health trainings in schools, and we look forward to continuing to work with our elected leaders to equip our school communities with the tools needed to create more supportive learning environments.”

“GenerationUp celebrates the passage of SB14 and thanks Governor Gavin Newsom for signing this bill into law. After working all year in local districts across California to implement Mental Health Days, we are excited that with the passage of SB14 students statewide will benefit from this restorative policy. In future years, GENup hopes to work on new initiatives for issues yet to be addressed, such as ensuring all teachers are adequately trained to support students’ mental health. We look forward to a day when California students have their mental health fully supported by their schools and communities, and looking forward to making that happen,” said Léo Corzo-Clark, former Student School Board Trustee of Albany Unified School District and Mental Health Coalition Lead at GENup.

“The County Behavioral Health Directors Association thanks Senator Portantino for introducing SB 14, and applauds Governor Gavin Newsom for signing this legislation,” said Michelle Doty Cabrera, Executive Director of CBHDA. “The pandemic has put at the forefront a need to better support the social-emotional well-being of students. This law to address the mental health needs of students is vital to ensuring we create a culture of strength and wellness within California schools.”

“A growing number of California youth have found themselves in the midst of a behavioral health crisis,” said Andy Imperato, Executive Director for Disability Rights California. “SB 14 is an important first step to provide our schools with the tools necessary to create supportive learning environments for students with mental health conditions in K-12 education.”

“The signing of SB 14 is a huge win for students across California. For years, students have struggled with mental health and the stigma surrounding it. SB 14 will help educate youth about mental health, equipping students with the knowledge to understand and tackle these issues. SB 14 will help alleviate the stigma and emphasize the importance of self-care, encouraging students to take time for wellbeing. SB 14 is groundbreaking legislation that will save the lives of millions of students and CASC is proud to have been a part of the process in allowing students to reach their fullest potential,” said Catherine Xu, Governmental Affairs Policy Director of California Association of Student Councils.

“The California Student Board Member Association applauds the Governor and Senator Portantino for their incredible work in passing Senate Bill 14. Last year, CSBMA led the charge in changing school district absence codes to legitimize student mental health. Our actions reflect the voices of millions of students who deserve to have their mental health needs recognized and supported. SB 14 takes the monumental step of changing the state absence code and finally granting excused absences for mental health. SB 14 also provides resources for staff to be trained in mental health first aid. On behalf of Student Board Members from across the State of California, CSBMA welcomes the changes brought forth in SB 14 and looks forward to working with local school boards to implement these reforms,” Zachary Patterson, President of California Student Board Member Association.

“Thank you, Governor Newsom, for signing SB 14, an important piece of legislation introduced by Senator Portantino that furthers mental health supports and services in schools at a time of great



CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AGENCIES

need for California’s youth.” Said Bill Smith, Founder of Inseparable “Evidence-based training can increase vital, often lifesaving, help-seeking behaviors. We are one step closer to giving all children the chance to pursue hopeful futures.”

###

[California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies \(CBHA\)](#) is a statewide association of non-profit agencies dedicated to providing mental health and substance use disorder programs and services to those in need across our state. We are dedicated to the proposition that the people of California deserve a rational and comprehensive community-based behavioral health system that is adequately funded to serve those in need. We are the voice of our agencies at the state Capitol, and with state agencies, and the federal government. Our goal is to ensure that federal, state, and county programs can support integrated healthcare services for people of all ages.