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SB 14 Aims to Address California's Growing Youth Mental Health Crisis

SACRAMENTO, CA – Today, a coalition of organizations including the California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA), NextGen Policy, California Behavioral Health Directors Association (CBHDA), Community Solutions, Sow A Seed Community Foundation, the California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions (CIBHS), Hathaway-Sycamores, and Turning Point Community Programs issued statements supporting SB 14. The bill, introduced by Senator Portantino, would require the California Department of Education to identify an evidence-based training program for a local educational agency to use to train classified and certificated school employees having direct contact with pupils in youth mental and behavioral health. The training will provide instruction on how school staff can best provide referrals to mental health services, substance use disorder services, or other support to individuals in the early stages of developing a mental illness or substance use disorder. The bill will also permit 10-12th grade students to receive training on the signs and symptoms of a behavioral health disorder. It will ensure that youth absences from school for a mental health issue or appointment will be considered an excused absence in the same fashion absences for physical health ailments or appointments are treated.

“The California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA) and our coalition partners are proud to endorse SB 14 authored by State Senator Anthony Portantino. One in six high school students report having considered suicide in the past year, while one in three LGBTQ students have had suicidal thoughts. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, youth mental and behavioral health needs to be a primary focus to protect and promote the wellbeing of our students,” said Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey, Chief Executive Officer. “This legislation will provide teachers and students with vital knowledge and skills needed to support their students and peers who are experiencing a behavioral health challenge. COVID-19 has elevated the need to strengthen school-based partnerships, and SB 14 is an essential step in ensuring students have a safe and supportive educational environment as they transition to hybrid learning environments”.

“Far too many of our children are struggling with stress, depression, and other mental health needs and we need to bring the discussion out of the shadows. Our challenges have become even more apparent during the pandemic. We must use this time before the complete reopening of our schools to increase mental health training to well-position our campuses to meet this growing issue head on, which is the best way to destigmatize mental health and get students in need the care they deserve. I am excited to be collaborating with CBHA and a broad coalition of mental health organizations who support this effort,” said Senator Anthony Portantino.

“NextGen Policy is proud to join CBHA in co-sponsoring SB 14, authored by Senator Portantino. SB 14 is a critical step in meeting California students' mental and behavioral health needs during a time of unprecedented stress and anxiety,” said Courtnie Thomas, Policy Advisor.

“Schools are a crucial referral pathway for identifying and bringing children and youth with mental health needs into services. Whether schools are doing remote or in person learning, the stress on learning communities and families has increased during the pandemic, while at the same time, the ability of school personnel to identify and refer students needing behavioral health interventions has been significantly challenged. This bill is urgently needed to help equip teachers and school staff to adequately identify and respond to a child or youth in crisis in real time, and ensure that student is linked to life saving behavioral health supports,” said Michelle Cabrera, Executive Director, County Behavioral Health Directors Association.

“Supportive learning environments are critical to our students’ ability to lead healthy and happy lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to increased isolation and risk of mental and behavioral health challenges. Community Solutions strongly supports SB 14, which will equip educators and youth with the tools needed to support students through these unprecedented circumstances and beyond.” Erin O’Brien, Chief Executive Officer.

“Now, more than ever it is imperative to support mental health training for educators and adults who spend time with our young people. Our youth deserve as much support as we can provide, and we have witnessed positive outcomes when adults are equipped to intervene,” said Rhodesia Ransom, Executive Director of Sow A Seed Community Foundation.

“CIBHS strongly supports CBHA’s proposed legislation to deploy an evidence-based approach to equip school staff and administrators to understand and better meet challenges posed to the behavioral health of students in California.” said Percy Howard, President and Chief Executive Officer.

“Evidence based trainings are key to introducing critical concepts about youth mental health to many individuals in a non-stigmatizing environment,” said Wendy Wang, Vice President of Public Policy & Advocacy for Hathaway-Sycamores.

“Turning Point Community Programs strongly supports SB 14, CBHA’s proposed legislation to deploy evidence-based approaches at school sites that will equip educators to better to understand and meet the unique mental challenges impacting students in California,” said Al Rowlett, Chief Executive Officer.

[California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies](#) is a statewide association of county funded non-profit community agencies dedicated to the proposition that the people of California deserve a rational, comprehensive, community-based behavioral health system that is adequately funded to serve all those in need of services. We are their voice at the Capitol and with state agencies, and work to ensure that state and county programs support integrated services for children, youth, adults and the elderly which includes physical health, behavioral health, housing, social services, education, substance abuse services and vocational rehabilitation.

[NextGen Policy](#) is a California based non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for progressive policy, legislative, and programmatic issues in the areas of: climate, affordable housing, voting rights, healthcare, criminal justice reform, education, natural resources, income inequality, mental health, consumer protection, and veteran affairs.

The [County Behavioral Health Directors Association](#) is a statewide non-profit association that represents all 58 county behavioral health directors and 2 city mental health programs (Berkeley and Tri-City) which is dedicated to advocating for public policy and services on behalf of people who are living with substance use disorders and mental illness.

[Sow A Seed Community Foundation](#) provides youth, their families, and the community with education, tools, and resources to overcome social and economic challenges, and lead positive, self-sufficient lives. Services include prevention and intervention assistance, educational programs, leadership training, and community support.

[California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions \(CIBHS\)](#) is a non-profit agency that helps health professionals, agencies and funders improve the lives of people with mental health and substance use challenges through policy, training, evaluation, technical assistance, and research.

[Hathaway-Sycamores](#) is a non-profit agency with the mission to cultivate hope and resilience to enrich the wellbeing of children, adults, families, and communities. In pursuit of this mission, we have also distinguished ourselves as a leader and strong advocate within the field of child welfare – consistently at the forefront of practice and policy.

[Community Solutions](#) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) agency that provide a comprehensive spectrum of prevention, intervention, treatment, and residential services to the communities of Santa Clara and San Benito Counties. They provide services and support to help children, families, and individuals overcome the challenges posed by mental health issues, substance abuse, trauma, severe family dysfunction, sexual and domestic violence, and human trafficking.

[Turning Point Community Programs](#) is a non-profit agency committed to empowering people of all ages and identifies to live their best life through the delivery of quality behavioral health and social services.