

January 29, 2021

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

Re: STRONG SUPPORT Senate Bill 224 – Pupil instruction: mental health education

Honorable Senator Portantino,

Mental Health America of California (MHAC), founded in 1957, is California's leading community based nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental health challenges and promoting the overall health of all Americans. Mental Health America of California has long sought to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness and to advocate on behalf of those experiencing mental health conditions.

Mental Health America of California strongly supports SB 224 – Pupil instruction: mental health education.

Our youth are in crisis. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **mental health problems are among the leading causes of illness and disability for children and adolescents** ages 10–19.<sup>1</sup> **Thoughts of suicide are trending upwards.** Youth who reported ever having seriously thought about committing suicide **increased 185%**, from 8.4% in 2009 to 24% in 2019.<sup>2</sup> **Currently, nearly 1 in 3 adolescents in California reports serious psychological distress.**<sup>3</sup> Senate Bill 224 is one of many approaches we must take to help rescue and empower our youth. Senate Bill 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.

Respectfully,



Heidi L. Strunk  
President & CEO

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Adolescent Mental Health. September 5, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<sup>2</sup> California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), 2019

<sup>3</sup> Wright, B. et al. (January 2021) *Nearly 1 in 3 Adolescence in California Report Psychological Distress*. (Health Policy Brief ISSN 2691-7475) UCLA Center for Health Policy Research