

February 23, 2023

The Honorable Chris Holden
California State Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0041



RE: SUPPORT AB 289 (Holden) – Mental Health Services Act

Dear Assembly Member Holden:

On behalf of Mental Health America of California (MHAC), I write to express our strong support for AB 289 (Holden), which would require youth and youth mental health organizations to be added to the list of stakeholders who must be included in discussions with counties as they develop their Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) three-year plans and annual updates.

Mental Health America of California (MHAC) is a peer-run organization that has been leading the state in behavioral health public policy and advocacy since 1957. The mission of MHAC is to ensure that people of all ages, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, language, race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, spirituality, religion, age or socioeconomic status who require mental health services and supports are able to live full and productive lives, receive the mental health services and other services that they need, and are not denied any other benefits, services, rights, or opportunities based on their need for mental health services. Along these lines, we support efforts which increase access to voluntary, appropriate, culturally responsive, mental health services for all Californians.

The MHSA was written to transform California's Public Mental Health System by prioritizing, among other things, extensive stakeholder involvement in the development, implementation, and evaluation of MHSA-funded county programs and services. The reasoning behind this is that each county will have different community needs, and the stakeholders living in the community are the most knowledgeable about the needs and service gaps within their own communities.

The behavioral health needs of Youth and Transition Age Youth (TAY) require services which are often separate and distinct from the services utilized by adults. For this reason, to ensure that MHSA-funded services in each county are responsive to the needs of youth, it is important that youth and youth mental health organizations be required stakeholders in county MHSA planning.

For these reasons, MHAC is in strong support of AB 289. If you have any questions and or if Mental Health America of California can be of any assistance on this or any other behavioral health bill, please contact me or our Interim Director of Public Policy Karen Vicari at kvicari@mhaofca.org.

In Community,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heidi L. Strunk".

Heidi L. Strunk
President & CEO