

March 29, 2023

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



Re: AB 236 (Holden) SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Holden:

On behalf of Mental Health America of California, I am writing to express our strong support of AB 236 (Holden), which would put an end to 'ghost lists' and rampant insurance provider list inaccuracies by reinforcing current policy with accuracy guidelines, benchmark goals, and effective enforcement methods.

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, culturally responsive, community-based behavioral health services.

Although California has strong laws and regulations regarding the accuracy of provider health plan directories, these laws are not adequately enforced. People in need of mental health services are routinely provided with outdated provider lists that are grossly inaccurate, with numerous providers listed who are unavailable to see new clients for a variety of reasons. This results in significant challenges and delays for people in need of behavioral health care in obtaining that care.

AB 236 would require health plans and insurers to annually audit their provider directories and remove inaccurate listings, with accuracy benchmarks beginning with 60% accuracy on January 1, 2024, increasing annually to reach 95% accuracy by January 1, 2027. Additionally, this measure would subject plans and insurers to penalties for failure to meet these benchmarks and for inaccurate listings in a provider directory. These enforcement provisions will result in meaningful improvements in access to care for Californians with behavioral health needs.

For these reasons, Mental Health America of California is in strong support of AB 236.

www.mhac.org

If you have any questions, or if MHAC can provide assistance on this bill or any other behavioral health legislation, please do not hesitate to contact me or our Interim Public Policy Director, Karen Vicari (kvicari@mhaofca.org).

In Community,

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

Heidi L. Strunk
President & CEO