

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
California State Assembly  
1021 O St., Suite 8630  
Sacramento CA 95814



**Subject: SUPPORT for SB 274 (Skinner)**

Dear Assembly Member Skinner:

Mental Health America of California is pleased to **SUPPORT** Senate Bill 274 (Skinner), legislation which would eliminate the sunset on willful defiance suspensions for middle school students and extend this safeguard to high school students. This measure would also prohibit the suspension or expulsion of any student based solely on truancy, tardy, or attendance records.

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 promote policies that improve the mental health of children, youth, and adults.

As our youth progress through life, they will face developmental challenges. As a community that supports one another it is vital to our youth that we foster an environment which nurtures and supports them. Suspending our youth, taking them out of school, away from friends, adult role models, and resources because of something like willful defiance does not support or nurture them. For our youth that face mental health challenges it could potentially be life threatening. Eliminating willful defiance and attendance suspensions will ensure that proactive approaches, which positively address student behavior, will be put into place in our schools.

For these reasons, we **SUPPORT** SB 274. If you or your staff have any questions, or if Mental Health America of California can be of assistance on this or any other behavioral health bill, please do not hesitate to contact me at [hstrunk@mhac.org](mailto:hstrunk@mhac.org), or our Interim Director of Public Policy, Karen Vicari at [kvicari@mhacofca.org](mailto:kvicari@mhacofca.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heidi Strunk'. The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract, with overlapping strokes.

Heidi Strunk  
President & CEO

[www.mhac.org](http://www.mhac.org)

Mental Health America of California

