

March 29, 2023

The Honorable John Laird
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8720
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4017



RE: Support for SB 857 (Laird)

Dear Senator Laird:

Mental Health America of California (MHAC) is pleased to support Senate Bill 857 (Laird), legislation which would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene an advisory task force to identify the statewide needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and plus (LGBTQ+) pupils and to assist in implementing supportive policies and initiatives to address LGBTQ+ pupil education.

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.

When curriculum, policy, strategic plans, or general decision-making in education occurs, it is important we take into consideration the perspectives of our most underserved and disproportionately impacted communities. Providing a space to be a part of the decision-making process guarantees the inclusion of those perspectives in the process. For our LGBTQ+ community, many supports and services don't provide adequate care or address basic needs to live full and productive lives. SB 857 not only works to identify what those needs are for this community, but requires the LGBTQ+ community to be a part of the task force which is making the identifications and recommendations.

For these reasons, we support Senate Bill 857. If you or your staff have any questions, or if Mental Health America of California can be of any assistance on this or any other behavioral health bill, please do not hesitate to contact me at hstrunk@mhac.org, or our Interim Director of Public Policy, Karen Vicari at kvicari@mhacofca.org.

In Community,

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

Heidi Strunk
President & CEO
Mental Health America of California

www.mhac.org