

April 4, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino  
California State Senate  
1021 O Street, Suite 7630  
Sacramento, CA 95814



RE: Support for Senate Bill 509 (Portantino)

Dear Senator Portantino,

Mental Health America of California (MHAC) is pleased to support Senate Bill 509 (Portantino), legislation which would require the Department of Education to identify training programs that instruct on recognizing the signs and symptoms of youth behavioral health disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major clinical depression, and anxiety disorders. In addition, the bill would require 75% of a local education agency's classified and certified employees, who have direct contact with pupils at school, receive behavioral health training. Furthermore, it would require pupils to receive evidence-based, age-appropriate mental health education from instructors trained in the appropriate courses at least once in elementary school, at least once in junior high school or middle school, and at least once in high school.

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.

Teaching our youth about behavioral health in addition to having trained school employees to recognize the signs of behavioral health challenges is key to providing the best services and support in our schools. Behavioral health challenges can start at a young age and, when recognized, can be addressed with support and services that foster healthy child and youth development. Senate Bill 509 could help our youth self-identify behavioral health challenges and seek help due to the consistent behavioral health education from elementary through high school. It also trains our school personnel to be able to recognize the signs associated with behavioral health challenges, informing them of the best way to help.

For these reasons, we support Senate Bill 509. 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

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

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).

In Community,



Heidi Strunk  
President & CEO  
Mental Health America of California