



May 26, 2020

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez, Chair
Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support – AB 2464 (Aguilar-Curry)

Dear Chairwoman Gonzalez,

On behalf of the members of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH) and the millions of patients they serve, I am writing to voice our support for AB 2464. This bill makes a critical investment in the mental health of the California's children and adolescents by establishing a statewide children's mental health access network to improve mental health care delivery for children ages 0-18, prioritizing low-income and underserved areas of the state. This bill will strategically expand the use of telemedicine and tele-consults to help primary care providers and their practices promote and manage the behavioral health of their pediatric patients, and connect the state's limited supply of specialty mental health providers to children and adolescents who currently lack access to these services.

As you know, California's 21 public health care systems are the core of the state's health care safety net, delivering high-quality care to more than 2.85 million patients annually, regardless of ability to pay or insurance status. Most patients seen in public health care systems are either Medi-Cal beneficiaries or remain uninsured. Statewide we provide nearly 30 and 40 percent of hospital care to the state's Medi-Cal and uninsured populations, respectively, and provide over 10 million outpatient visits each year. Public health care systems also operate half of the state's top-level trauma and burn centers, and train half of all physicians in the state. They also serve hundreds of thousands of Californians as their chosen source for primary, specialty, and hospital care. To a large extent, their patient population has complex and multiple medical needs. Filling their significant and multiple roles, public health care systems have a profound impact on the health care and health of millions of Californians.

Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and three-quarters begin by age 24. In fact, it is estimated that as many as 1.8 million California children may be living with a mental health diagnosis, but only 20% of them are currently accessing treatment. Mental health related hospitalizations and emergency room visits are on the rise, and suicide is now the second leading cause of death for California youth between the ages of 10 and 24. Left untreated, mental health needs that manifest themselves in childhood and adolescence often lead to lifelong challenges, increased mortality and

morbidity, and long-term costs for individuals, their families and communities. These needs have only become more acute in the COVID-19 crisis as California youth struggle to adapt to shelter-in-place.

At the same time, California is suffering from a severe shortage of mental health providers, especially those with expertise treating children and adolescents. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry recommends 47 board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 children, but California currently has only 13, and 45% of them are over the age of 60. While training more pediatric specialty mental health professionals must be a state priority, many children and adolescents whose mental health needs could be effectively managed in a primary care setting currently go untreated because their primary care providers lack the training and resources they need to adequately meet their patients' mental health needs.

AB 2464 will help address these problems by creating a statewide network that connects pediatric mental health providers with primary care providers to provide quick access to psychiatric consultations, facilitate referrals, and encourage and support PCPs in integrating mental health resources into their practices. The legislation is based on similar successful programs in other states including Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington.

For these reasons, CAPH is pleased to support AB 2464 because it will ensure more children receive the mental health care services they desperately need. We would be pleased to further discuss our position with you and answer any questions you may have. Please contact Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, our Sacramento representative, at 916-272-0011 if you would like to follow-up. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Erica B. Murray', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erica B. Murray
President and CEO
California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems

cc: The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
The Honorable Members of the Assembly Appropriations Committee
Lisa Murawski, Principal Consultant
Alex Khan, Republican Consultant
Ann-Louise Kuhns, California Children's Hospital Association
Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Hurst Brooks Espinosa