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June 14, 2017

The Honorable Marc Berman  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0024  
Fax: (916) 319-2124

RE: AB 1261 (Berman): Pupil discipline: expulsions: pupil suicide prevention.  
AAP-CA Position: SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Berman:

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), representing over 5,000 California pediatricians, strongly supports your proposed legislation AB 1261 (Berman). This bill would require schools with a mandatory expulsion policy or zero tolerance policy for an offense related to substance use, to consider whether that expulsion policy is deterring students from seeking help for substance abuse.

All children deserve a safe, supportive learning environment. While in rare occasions suspension may be necessary to reaching this goal, national AAP policy, based on a review of available research, holds that “out-of-school suspension and expulsion are counterproductive to the intended goals, rarely if ever are necessary, and should not be considered as appropriate discipline in any but the most extreme and dangerous circumstances, as determined on an individual basis rather than as a blanket policy” (March 2013). These “most extreme and dangerous circumstances” clearly do not include many juvenile instances of substance abuse, which adolescents often use to mask the symptoms of untreated mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, toxic stress, and a multitude of other causes. It is essential that we get these children and teens the mental health care they need, rather than making it harder for them to access an education—which, in any case, only makes it more likely that they will continue to abuse substances. As pediatricians, we are very concerned about adolescent substance abuse, but we are also concerned about the denial of an adequate education to children who commit what in reality is a very common teenage offense.

AB 1261 (Berman) would help ensure that students in grades 7 to 12 who commit a drug or alcohol offense receive the consideration they deserve during expulsion proceedings. By emphasizing the connections between substance abuse and mental health issues, this bill would ensure that more adolescents are able to access needed mental health services, which would itself improve and even save the lives of some of our state’s most vulnerable students.

Pediatricians strongly support AB 1261 (Berman). We thank you for your public service and for your leadership on behalf of the health and well-being of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,



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Senior Policy Analyst, AAP-CA



Kris Calvin, Chief Executive Officer  
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

CC: AAP-CA Leadership; Lydia Bourne