



March 26, 2018

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: ?AB 2018 (Maienschein) Mental health workforce planning: loan forgiveness and scholarship programs
AAP-CA Position: Support

Dear Chair Wood,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), representing over 5,000 California pediatricians, strongly supports AB 2018 (Maienschein), which would clarify that the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development needs to include in the 5-year education and training development plan both expansion plans for loan forgiveness and scholarship programs offered in return for a commitment to employment in California's public mental health system and expansion plans for making loan forgiveness programs available to current employees of the mental health system who want to obtain Associate of Arts, Bachelor of Arts, master's degrees, or doctoral degrees.

Children's mental health is an intrinsic part of their overall health and well-being. At least one in 10 children—as many as 6 million youth—experience a mental illness that severely disrupts his or her daily functioning at home, in school, or in the community. Another 16% of children have symptoms that do not rise to the level of a diagnosis but have functional impairment, and another 9% have a mental health diagnosis without current impairment. Fewer than 20% of these children receive mental health services in any given year due to the numerous barriers that prevent children and their families from obtaining needed services, including mental health professional shortages (AAP Strategies for System Change in Children's Mental Health).

Addressing the psychiatric shortage involves tackling the heavy burden of debt so many students shoulder as they pursue an advanced medical degree. It is not unusual in California to find psychiatric residents in training with debt loads that exceed \$200,000. For decades, governments have used loan repayment and loan forgiveness programs to fuel interest in hard-to-fill practice sectors deemed vital to the public interest. It's time California expanded such programs for psychiatric residents who commit to working in the public sector.

AB 2018 (Maienschein) will amend current statute for state loan repayment programs to allow trainees that meet necessary criteria to be eligible for loan repayment during their training as effective debt relief is a key component of the comprehensive strategy required to recruit medical students to a career in psychiatry and steer high-caliber psychiatric residents into training as community specialists.

Pediatrician members of AAP California Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 across the state urge you to vote AYE on AB 2018

(Maienschein). Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping loop followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish at the end.

Melissa J. Ruiz, M.D., M.P.H., Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Early Career Physician Representative, American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: Assembly Health Committee Members
Office of Honorable Brian Maienschein, California State Assembly (Author)
AAP-CA Leadership; Lobbyist Lydia Bourne

AAP Strategies for System Change in Children's Mental Health: A Chapter Action Kit: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Mental-Health/Documents/finalcak.pdf>