**American Academy of Pediatrics**

DETECTED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

American Academy of Pediatrics, California

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Assembly Member Jimmy Gomez, Chair
Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814
Fax: 916.319.2181

**RE: AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas)**
**AAP-CA Position: Support**

Dear Assembly Member Gomez,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), representing over 5,000 board-certified California primary care and subspecialty pediatricians statewide, strongly supports proposed legislation AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas) to improve mental health care access for foster children.

AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas) would help diminish barriers to mental health care for foster kids who receive such care outside of their home counties. Under current law, the responsibility of providing mental health services and any related funding remains with the county of origin, even after a foster youth moves to a different county. As a result, almost one in five of all youth in the state’s child welfare system are left in limbo, waiting for mental health services that often take months to begin. There are significant long-term outcomes when we fail to address mental health issues in children early on, including poor academic performance, increased family stress and conflict, and poor social functioning. Mental health problems often persist into adulthood, so it is important to address them early in childhood. By expanding access to mental health programs, pediatricians can better identify and provide services to children in the community and intervene proactively to maintain these vulnerable children's overall health.

According to the AAP Committee on Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care: "Youth in foster care face medical and mental health challenges at significantly higher rates than other children, often as a consequence of the circumstances that led to their removal from their home and sometimes exacerbated by their experiences in foster care. These health issues include developmental delays, mental retardation, emotional adjustment problems, chronic medical problems, birth defects, substance abuse, and pregnancy. In the foster care population, more than 60% of youth will have mental health problems during their lifetime; 30% to 40% of adolescents are coping with mental health issues, including posttraumatic stress disorder; and more than one-third of older adolescents have a chronic illness or disability." (2012)

By supporting AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas), the state would save time and money currently wasted in trying to negotiate and untangle the bureaucratic red tape that restricts foster children's access to these important services. Moreover, prevention is almost always far less costly to the state than the cost of poor outcomes associated with long-term mental health issues, including poorer physical health and, in some cases, costs incurred in the criminal justice system.
With nearly 12,000 children who could benefit from the proposed streamlined access, AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas) would make a real difference in the lives of a significant number of our California children and youth.

Pediatricians urge your AYE vote on AB 1299 (Ridley-Thomas).

Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and well being of children in California.

Nancy Graff, MD
AAP-CA State Government Affairs Committee

Betty Shum, MD
AAP-CA Senior Policy Analyst (Resident Advocate)

cc: Assembly Member Ridley-Thomas, Kris Calvin CEO AAP-CA, Lydia Bourne, AAP-CA Leadership