

April 22, 2019

Assembly Member Cristina Garcia
Capitol Office, Room 2013
Sacramento, California, 94249

**RE: AB 163 (Garcia) Group homes: foster family agencies: unaccompanied undocumented minors.
AAP-CA Position: Support**

Dear Assembly Member Garcia,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California, representing over 5,000 board-certified pediatricians statewide, strongly supports your proposed legislation AB 163. This bill would require the State Department of Social Services to create a facilities liaison position within its immigration services unit to connect state-licensed group homes, short-term residential therapeutic programs (STRTP), foster family agencies, and resource families that serve undocumented immigrant youth with appropriate supports and services, including legal services, mental health assessments and services, and public benefits.

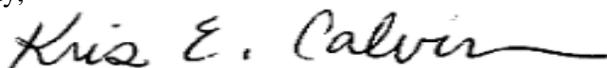
Thousands of undocumented unaccompanied minors are taken into custody in the United States a year. Between Oct. 1, 2017 and Aug. 21, 2018 alone, an estimated 45,704 unaccompanied minors were apprehended by federal authorities as they tried to enter California through its southern border. Many of these children have arrived in the United States seeking to escape from harm. Forty-eight percent of unaccompanied, undocumented minors report leaving their home country because of violence (including gang violence, violence perpetrated by organized crime or government and sexual violence), and 22% report abuse at home.

It has been difficult for the state to make sure these children are receiving appropriate care while their cases are deliberated on or prior to being reunited with family. AB 163 helps to address this problem by creating a dedicated authority to provide services for children in need. The facilities liaison would be tasked with communicating complaints regarding housing facilities and care with the State Department of Social Services' Community Care Licensing Division to better ensure that children are being treated appropriately. Moreover, the liaison would connect local mental health and legal resources to undocumented unaccompanied minors in custody.

The liaison position created through AB 163 would allow California to better safeguard the wellbeing of these vulnerable children and youth.

Pediatricians across the state of California strongly support your proposed legislation AB 163. Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and well-being of the children, youth, and families of California.

Sincerely,



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

cc: AAP-CA Leadership