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September 9, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 855 (Wiener): Health coverage: mental health or substance use disorders.
AAP-CA Position: Support

Dear Governor Newsom:

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing the over 5,000 pediatrician members of California AAP Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 statewide, strongly supports proposed legislation SB 855 (Wiener) as amended on August 24, 2020. This bill replaces current law with a broader requirement on health plans and disability insurers to cover medically necessary treatment of mental health and substance use disorders (MH/SUD) under the same terms and conditions applied to other medical conditions while also establishing new requirements for medically necessary care determinations, utilization review, and banning discretionary clauses in health plan contracts.

MH/SUD can impact children directly and indirectly. Emotional and behavioral problems can develop at any age. For children, these conditions can have long-lasting emotional and physical implications. In addition, emotional and substance abuse problems experienced by caregivers or others in the home also impact a child's physical and mental health. The National American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has stated "that mental health care is a basic need of children and adolescents."¹ There are many barriers to access to care even for those who have insurance, not the least of which is coverage denials based on insurers' determinations that MH/SUD care is not medically necessary. Additionally, definitions of what is or isn't medically necessary can vary from insurer to insurer.

SB 855 (Wiener) would require insurers to cover all medically necessary mental health and addiction treatments and would require insurers to use criteria that are fully consistent with generally accepted standards of mental health and addiction care when making medical necessity determinations for MH/SUD services.

Pediatricians across the state of California respectfully request your signature on SB 855 (Wiener). 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kris E. Calvin".

Kris Calvin
Chief Executive Officer
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: AAP-CA Leadership

¹ https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/gettingpaid_payeradvocacy_letter_to_payers.pdf