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May 3, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Portantino  
State Capitol, Room 5050  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 224 (Portantino): Pupil Instruction: Mental Health Instruction**  
**AAP-CA Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Portantino,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing over 3,000 pediatrician members strongly supports SB 224, as amended on March 17, 2021, which would ensure that pupils between grades 1 and 12 receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least one time during elementary school, one time during middle school, and one time during high school.

According to a white paper from the California Children's Hospital Association, half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three-quarters begin by age 24.<sup>1</sup> In a June 2020 CDC study, 1 in 4 youth ages 18 to 24 said they had seriously considered suicide in the past 30 days — more than twice as the rate of any other age group. COVID-19 has exacerbated the issue.

There are many barriers to accessing mental health care. Stigmas related to seeking mental health care and not understanding signs and symptoms are high on the list. Education about mental health care can help students recognize problems, show them how to reach out for help, and reduce those stigmas through understanding. Currently, however, there is no requirement to teach health in middle school and high school in California beyond the requirement to teach comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education.

SB 224 would ensure that pupils between grades 1 and 12 receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least one time during elementary school, one time during middle school, and one time during high school.

AAP-CA strongly supports SB 224. Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,



Jacques Corriveau, M.D. FAAP  
Chair, State Government Affairs Committee  
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: AAP Leadership

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ccha.org/behavioral-health>