



## News Release

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## Children & Behavioral Health Advocates Respond to Veto of AB 552

Sacramento – Sponsors of AB 552 joined Asm. Sharon Quirk-Silva (D-Fullerton) in responding to Gov. Gavin Newsom’s veto of legislation that would address the alarming behavioral health crisis among children and youth by encouraging school districts, county behavioral health agencies, and community-based organizations to partner on providing on-school campus behavioral health services for students.

“As we grapple with the effects of a sense of isolation from the pandemic, we are experiencing an unprecedented rise in behavioral health needs among our children. We’ve seen an increase in anxiety from students as they came out of isolation, which is why providing support to schools and students who are struggling with any issues relating to mental health that might impact them during the school day and their success in their classrooms should be paramount. AB 552 would have provided yet another tool to address this crisis by allowing early intervention services on our K-12 campuses where behavioral health conditions can be identified at the earliest onset,” said **Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva**. “While I’m disappointed by Governor Newsom’s veto of AB 552, I will continue to work with my legislative colleagues and advocates to ensure access to mental and behavioral health resources for all K-12 students.”

The bill was co-sponsored by the County Behavioral Health Directors’ Association (CBHDA) and the California Alliance of Child and Family Services (the Alliance). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children’s mental health–related emergency department visits increased and remained elevated during the pandemic. Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health–related visits for children aged 5–11 and 12–17 years increased approximately 24% and 31%, respectively throughout the pandemic. Even with the pandemic waning, the world continues to be a stressful place for a lot of children. Behavioral health, mental wellness and support will be crucial for this generation of students.

“The Governor’s vision that all children should be able to link to comprehensive behavioral health coverage through their schools is absolutely right. County behavioral health directors strongly believed that AB 552 was a straightforward solution that would immediately expand access for children, youth and families to available behavioral health treatment services, regardless of insurance type. Now we look forward to continuing to work with Assemblymember Quirk-Silva and the administration to realize that shared vision,” added **Michelle Doty Cabrera, Executive Director of CBHDA**.

While many school districts partner with county behavioral health departments, current funding to support these programs is generally limited to students who are covered by Medi-Cal. AB 552 promoted expansion of these programs by ensuring students who are covered by commercial insurance plans could also access behavioral health services where they are provided on campuses.

“On behalf of 160 community-based organizations serving California children and families, we are deeply disappointed in Governor Newsom’s veto of AB 552. California’s youth are experiencing an unprecedented mental health crisis. AB 552 would have expedited mental health care and services to California school students starting January 1, 2023, leveraging the expertise of community-based organizations across the state with expertise serving youth and families. Delay in meeting our children’s needs will allow the crisis to worsen, and will have manifold future costs - including foreclosed future opportunities for today’s youth and more expensive and intensive behavioral health treatment needed later, said **Chris Stoner-Mertz, Executive Director of the Alliance**. “Nothing could be more important than investing in our children’s mental health and the U.S. Surgeon General’s December 2021 [advisory](#) makes clear we cannot wait to deliver this care to our kids. Successful partnerships between counties, school districts and non-profit, community-based organizations grounded in California’s diverse communities are crucial to meeting these needs and should be called upon to do so immediately.”

*The County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA) is a nonprofit advocacy association representing the behavioral health directors from each of California’s 58 counties, as well as two cities (Berkeley and Tri-City).*

*The California Alliance of Child and Family Services is the collective voice of more than 160 non-profit, community-based organizations that serve children, youth and families.*