



July 22, 2020

The Honorable Jim Wood, Chair
Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support – SB 855 (Wiener): Health coverage: mental health or substance abuse disorders

Dear Chairman Wood,

On behalf of the members of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems and the millions of patients they serve, I am writing to voice our support for SB 855, which will update and strengthen California's mental health parity law.

As you know, California's 21 public health care systems are the core of the state's health care safety net, delivering high-quality care to more than 2.85 million patients annually, regardless of ability to pay or insurance status. Public health care systems include both county-operated or -affiliated facilities, as well as the University of California medical centers. Most patients seen in public health care systems are either Medi-Cal beneficiaries or remain uninsured. Statewide, we provide nearly 40 percent of all hospital care to the state's uninsured, and 35 percent of all hospital care to the Medi-Cal population. Public health care systems also operate over half of the state's top-level trauma and burn centers, and train half of all physicians in the state.

As safety net providers that serve the most vulnerable populations in our communities, including many with behavioral health conditions, we believe that all Californians should have access to high quality mental health and addiction treatment. Currently, California law only requires commercial health plans to cover medically necessary treatment for a limited number of mental health (but no substance use) disorders. By updating the California Mental Health Parity Act, we can ensure that more Californians receive the behavioral health services and supports that they need to thrive. In the face of the COVID-19 public health emergency, and the toll it is having and will continue to have on our emotional well-being, it has become even more imperative that California pass this legislation.

It is for these reasons that we support SB 855. We would be pleased to further discuss our position with you and answer any questions you may have. Please contact Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, our Sacramento representative, at 916-272-0011 if you would like to follow-up. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sarah Hesketh".

Sarah Hesketh
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cc: The Honorable Scott Wiener
The Honorable Members of the Assembly Health Committee
Judith Babcock, Committee Consultant
Alex Khan, Republican Consultant
Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Hurst Brooks Espinosa