



AB 2281: Mental Health Preschool Services Act

Background

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association have declared a national emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing mental health crisis for our youth.

The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission awards grants to fund partnerships between educational and county mental health entities.

The Problem

The Commonwealth Fund's Health System Delivery Data Center ranked California 48th for providing mental health services to children.

Access to care is limited by the behavioral health workforce shortage. Minority and low-income individuals often have more difficulty reaching providers when they are available.

The CDC reports that in early 2021 emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys compared to the same temporal period in 2019.

The children returning to school after observing social distancing protocols and learning through remote access are experiencing absenteeism and behavioral issues. For so long, they were separated from individuals mandated to report suspicion of abuse or neglect.

Solution

A focus on addressing young children's mental health would reduce the toxic stress, trauma, and anxiety during a crucial developmental period.

Research shows that half of all lifetime cases of diagnosable mental illnesses begin by age 14, three-fourths begin by age 24, and most substance use begins in adolescence, emphasizing the need to strengthen prevention and early identification and intervention services.

Thankfully, California's Surgeon General has developed protocols and training for mandated reporters to assist with detection of children suffering from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and California has invested \$4.4 billion in the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative.

While we are moving to a statewide, inclusive, and comprehensive approach to tackling this long-term problem, individual counties need support in expanding services to children suffering at a younger age.

What This Bill Will Do

This bill would establish the Mental Health Preschool Services Act, administered by the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission, to award grants to mental health entities funding partnerships between these entities and preschool and daycare programs for children from birth to 5 years of age.

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