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*Providing Leadership in
Health Policy and Advocacy*



nami California
National Alliance on Mental Illness

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: AB 1331 (Irwin) – Cosponsored

Dear Assemblymember Gonzalez:

In California, people experiencing a behavioral health crisis are increasingly unable to get the care they need. In virtually no corner of the state can they or their families be assured they will get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

That's why the California Hospital Association and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, California are proud to cosponsor Assembly Bill (AB) 1331 (Irwin), which would establish a new position at the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to focus on establishing and monitoring a comprehensive crisis care system that ensures Californians receive the care they deserve in the most expedient way possible.

The state has never had a comprehensive, integrated network of services on which people in a mental health or substance use disorder crisis can rely. Instead, we have a complex patchwork of state and local agencies involved at different touch points, with services that vary by county and based on whether a person is covered by Medi-Cal or private insurance. As a result, people in a behavioral health crisis too often face arrest, involuntary detention, multiple hospitalizations, homelessness, and even early death.

In many communities, behavioral health crisis services are delivered too late — either by law enforcement or in hospital emergency departments. Although emergency department doors are always open to anyone in need, hospitals are not typically equipped with the array of community-based resources needed to serve this population and ensure they receive necessary long-term support. Once discharged, too few people get the intensive follow-up care needed to prevent a crisis from recurring.

AB 1331 would create a new leadership position within DHCS who would build a system that:

- Promotes successful and evidence-based behavioral health service delivery
- Convenes state and local leaders to develop a cohesive approach to statewide crisis care
- Ensures continuity of services and access points through statewide coordination of programs
- Collects and analyzes data on existing behavioral health program effectiveness
- Maximizes competencies and infrastructure to advance prevention and early intervention

A comprehensive and integrated crisis network of voluntary care — that is available statewide — is a first line of defense in protecting civil rights and civil liberties, and in preventing tragedies of public and patient safety. Effective crisis care saves lives and dollars, but we must invest in a systemic approach and establish leadership at the state level.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote AYE on AB 1331.

Sincerely,



Carmela Coyle
President & CEO
California Hospital Association



Jessica Cruz
CEO
National Alliance on Mental Illness, California

cc: The Honorable Jacqui Irwin
The Honorable Members of Assembly Appropriations Committee
Lisa Murawski, Consultant, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Joe Shinstock, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus