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March 20, 2020

The Honorable Richard Pan
Chair, Senate Committee on Health
California State Capitol, Room 5114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 854 (Beall): Health care coverage: Substance use disorders – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Pan,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness – California (NAMI-CA) is in strong support of SB 854 (Beall), which will eliminate barriers to life-saving treatment for substance use disorders.

NAMI-CA is the statewide affiliate of the country's largest mental health advocacy organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Our over 110,000 active advocates and 62 affiliates include many people living with serious mental illnesses, their families, and supporters. NAMI-CA advocates on their behalf, providing education and support to its members and the broader community.

People with a mental health issue are more likely to experience a substance use disorder than those not affected by a mental illness. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found an estimated 3.2 million adults in the United States had both a serious mental illness and at least one substance use disorder in the past year.

Californians in crisis often face barriers and delays when they seek help for substance use disorders. Medication-assisted treatment, or MAT, is an evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders. Even when a doctor determines a patient needs MAT, patients often go without it due to prior authorization and step therapy requirements. These barriers to access can mean many lost lives. SB 854 removes these barriers and allows doctors to provide timely and appropriate treatment.

We must break the stigma of mental health and substance use disorder care and ensure patients the treatments they need without obstruction. For these reasons, we proudly support SB 854.

Sincerely,



Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer