



For Immediate Release

## **Portantino Wants Students to Receive Mental Health Education Introduces Bill to Create and Teach Curriculum for K-12 Schools**

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**Sacramento, California** – State Senator **Anthony J. Portantino** (D – La Cañada Flintridge) has introduced SB 224 to require all students in California receive age appropriate mental health education. Specifically, this bill ensures that pupils between grades 1 and 12 receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least one time during elementary school, one time during middle school, and one time during high school. As a result, students will receive instruction on mental health at least three separate times during their schooling. Portantino’s bill requires instruction and related materials are appropriate for use with pupils of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Instruction must also be appropriate for pupils with disabilities and English learners. Educational topics include but are not limited to the overarching themes and core principals of mental health.

**“It is inarguable that we are in the midst of a mental health crisis in California. Even before the pandemic, the rate of students struggling with mental health problems such as depression has steadily risen over the years. Now isolated from their family and friends, students are suffering even more. Mental health is just as important as physical health and it is unfortunate that we neglect it in our curriculum. By educating kids from a young age, we can bring these issues out of the shadows and end the stigma and taboo surrounding the discussion of mental health,”** commented **Senator Portantino.**

SB 224 continues the Senator's dedication to improving youth mental health outcomes. The Senator previously authored SB 972 , which required schools to print the suicide hotline on student identification cards. Additionally, the Senator dedicated three years to pass SB 328 which pushes back start times for middle and high schools. Scientific data and research shows that later school start times lead to improved mental health for kids, with reductions in instances of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. For his past work, Senator Portantino received the Children's Hero Award from the California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and was recently recognized by Family Services Agency in Burbank.

SB 224 is co-sponsored by a coalition of mental health advocate groups including the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN), California Alliance of Child and Family Services, California Children's Partnership, and the National Center for Youth Law. Please see the following quotes from the Senator's coalition partners in support of this bill.

**“Mental illness impacts families, individuals and communities across our state on a daily basis,” said Jessica Cruz, CEO of the California chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI CA). “Schools are one of the first points of contact where students show early signs and symptoms of an onset of mental illness. In order to change our culture in how we respond to mental illness, we must educate students early and often. With suicide rates in young adults at an all-time high, it is more important than ever that we implement curriculum that will help connect students and families to the appropriate resources and treatments available.”**

**“The impact Covid-19 has had on the youth of our state has been staggering and is exacerbating inequities that existed before the pandemic began,” said Christine Stoner-Mertz, CEO of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services. “But we believe there are steps we can take to positively impact the lives of generations of youth to come, and that is through mandatory mental**

**health education in schools. By creating awareness of mental health from a young age, students will be able to recognize the signs of mental illness in themselves and their peers, allowing them to be connected to resources and receive help before things become more serious. Bringing discussions about mental health into the classroom is vital in reducing the stigma around mental illness. We are proud to sponsor this legislation and create awareness about student mental health.”**

**“The high rates of suicide and behavioral health hospitalizations among California youth is indicative of a huge mental health crisis. Mental health needs to be brought to the forefront in conversations about health and wellness in schools and to connect students to potentially life-saving resources. Fostering discussions about mental health in the educational environment normalizes these topics, reducing the stigma of mental illnesses and mental health treatment,” added Zofia Trexler, CAYEN CA Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN) Board President.**

Senator Portantino is also authoring SB 14 this year to require that a proportion of each school’s staff and teachers be trained in evidence-based mental health training programs. SB 14 also would additionally align mental health and behavioral health with physical health as it pertains to excused absences. These two bills will ensure that both our educators and students are aware of and can respond effectively to mental health issues.

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**Website of Senator Anthony J. Portantino:** <http://sd25.senate.ca.gov/>

Sen. Portantino represents nearly 930,000 people in the 25th Senate District, which includes Altadena, Atwater Village, Bradbury, Burbank, Claremont, Duarte, Glendale, Glendora, La Cañada Flintridge, La Crescenta, Lake View Terrace, La Verne, Los Feliz, Monrovia, Montrose, Pasadena, San Dimas, San Marino, Shadow Hills, Sierra Madre, South Pasadena, Sunland-Tujunga, and Upland.