



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI California

March 1, 2021

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The Honorable Connie Leyva
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4061
Sacramento, CA 95814

**SB 224 (Portantino) Pupil instruction: mental health education –
SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Leyva:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness - California (NAMI-CA), I am writing to request your support for SB 224, which would ensure that California students receive crucial mental health education.

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.

Children and youth are experiencing escalating mental health needs and face numerous barriers to accessing care and support. According to the most recent [Commonwealth Fund Scorecard](#) on State Health System Performance, California ranks 48th in the nation for providing children with needed mental health care. Early data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating children's mental health needs. For example, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reported that beginning in April 2020, the proportion of mental-health related emergency department visits among all pediatric emergency department visits increased by 24% for children ages 5-11 and by 31% for children ages 12-17.

Now more than ever, it is critical that California equip all of its students with the information and tools necessary to promote positive mental health, and to seek mental health support and treatment when needed. SB 224 will ensure that students receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least once during elementary school, once during middle school, and once during high school. This education will help increase awareness, empower students to seek support, and reduce the stigma associated with experiencing mental health challenges.

For these reasons, NAMI-CA is pleased to co-sponsor SB 224. I may be reached at jessica@namica.org or (916) 567-0163 with any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer