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April 14, 2021

The Honorable Henry I. Stern  
California State Senator  
California State Capitol, Room 4027  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 508 (Stern) Mental health coverage: school-based services – SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Stern:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness - California (NAMI-CA), I am writing to express support of your SB 508, which improves children and adolescents' access to needed mental health services.

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.

SB 508 will ensure health plans meet their legal requirement to provide mental health services to youth enrollees who are referred by their schools, as well as require plans to collaborate with local education agencies (LEAs) when 15% of an LEA's student population are enrolled in a particular health plan. Children and youth are experiencing escalating mental health needs and face numerous barriers to accessing care and support. Early data indicate that the COVID-19 public health emergency 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, health plans must rise to the challenge of reaching the many young Californians returning to school.

For these reasons, NAMI-CA is pleased to support SB 508. I may be reached at [jessica@namica.org](mailto:jessica@namica.org) or (916) 567-0163 with any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS  
Chief Executive Officer

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