



April 4, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino  
California State Senate  
1021 O Street, Suite 7630  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for Senate Bill 509 (Portantino)

Dear Senator Portantino,

The California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN) is pleased to support Senate Bill 509 (Portantino), legislation which would require the Department of Education to identify training programs that instruct on recognizing the signs and symptoms of youth behavioral health disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major clinical depression, and anxiety disorders. In addition, the bill would require 75% of a local education agency's classified and certified employees, who have direct contact with pupils at school, receive behavioral health training. Furthermore, it would require pupils to receive evidence-based, age-appropriate mental health education from instructors trained in the appropriate courses at least once in elementary school, at least once in junior high school or middle school, and at least once in high school.

CAYEN is a youth-led statewide network comprised of Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Action Teams and CAYEN Board members which engage, empowers and represents TAY, ages 15-26, in mental health advocacy on issues that directly affect TAY. Since CAYEN's inception in 2006, CAYEN has taken many forms of action to empower TAY in their personal lives and spark progressive change in public policy.

Behavioral health challenges can start at a young age and, when recognized, can be addressed with support and services that foster healthy early childhood to transitional age development. The ability to recognize those signs and understand what they mean requires consistent education and training. Senate Bill 509 could help our teachers identify, and our youth self-identify behavioral health challenges and seek help by establishing consistent behavioral health education from elementary to high school.

As our youth understand more about themselves and seek help, it is important we have a strong support system in place. Under this bill, school employees would also receive behavioral health training on the signs and best practices. This transforms our schools into safe and nurturing environments for child and youth development.

For these reasons, we support Senate Bill 509. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [dthirakul@mhac.org](mailto:dthirakul@mhac.org), or our Interim Director of Public Policy, Karen Vicari at [kvicari@mhacofca.org](mailto:kvicari@mhacofca.org).

[www.ca-yen.org](http://www.ca-yen.org)

In Community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Thirakul', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Danny Thirakul  
Public Policy Coordinator  
California Youth Empowerment Network