

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2007 (Salas): Medi-Cal: federally qualified health center: rural health clinic: telehealth – SPONSOR/SUPPORT

Dear Dr. Wood,

The Children's Partnership (TCP), a California-based children's advocacy organization committed to improving the lives of underserved children with breakthrough solutions at the intersection of policy and community engagement, is pleased to sponsor and support AB 2007 (Salas), which would improve access to health care services for low-income children and other marginalized populations by ensuring that providers can deliver care using telehealth.

The COVID-19 public health crisis has made clear the importance of timely access to health care services, such as screenings. In considering how California can respond to the urgent needs caused by the crisis, the state moved forward a request to the federal government to expand telehealth options in order to minimize disruption to our health care system and prioritize care for those who need it most, while providing easier, more accessible options for other Californians seeking care. Much of our work focuses on ensuring children in our most marginalized communities have adequate access to the services they need to thrive. Too many children in California do not receive the preventive health care services they are entitled to: according to a 2019 state auditor's report, an annual average of 2.4 million children enrolled in Medi-Cal do not receive any preventive services. With the current crisis, we are at risk of further regression in access to care for children.

Building on the state's commitment to respond to COVID-19 with an expansion of telehealth, California can further address access barriers for children by ensuring community health centers are able to bring care to where children are, through innovative solutions like telehealth. Rapidly advancing telehealth models use technology to bring high-quality and safe care to children at schools, early learning centers, and other community sites where they spend time. Community health centers are critical sources of care in California, serving as a health care safety net for the most vulnerable populations. AB 2007 (Salas) supports health centers' ability to establish and serve patients by bringing health care to safe and trusted community sites within their designated service areas—such as schools and early learning sites—using effective telehealth models.

One evidence-based example is the Virtual Dental Home (VDH), in which specially trained dental hygienists and assistants go to schools and other community sites to provide diagnostic,

preventive, and early intervention dental care in partnership with a collaborating dentist. A six-year study of the VDH model, in which almost 3,500 individuals were seen in 50 community sites across California, found that the majority of patients could receive all of the care they needed at the community location. Additionally, parents do not need to take time off of work and a child does not need to miss school to get timely and needed care.

When schools across California reopen after this time of emergency, students will need access to mental and behavioral health resources more than ever. In recent years, the legislature has looked to telehealth as one key strategy in addressing the barriers faced by students in accessing mental and behavioral health care in their communities. In 2018, AB 2315 (Quirk-Silva) was enacted to support the use of telehealth to provide mental and behavioral health services in public schools. In order for successful implementation, health centers providing mental and behavioral health services via telehealth will need to establish students as patients at school sites, not within the health center walls. In order to support our youth in this unprecedented time of fear and uncertainty, it makes sense to ensure all students are able to connect with mental health professionals without needing to visit clinics.

AB 2007 (Salas) will ensure that as the need for care delivered via telehealth continues to grow, we will have policies in place to support these innovative solutions to provide safe, high-quality care to California's most vulnerable populations. This bill has the potential to increase access to vital and cost-effective health care services to thousands of children in underserved communities across California – during times of crisis and always.

For these reasons, we are proud to sponsor and strongly support AB 2007 (Salas). We respectfully ask for your AYE vote in the Assembly Health Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mayra Alvarez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mayra E. Alvarez, MHA
President

Cc: Members, Assembly Health Committee
Assemblymember Rudy Salas, author