

April 12, 2022

To: The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker, State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8330
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
President pro Tempore, State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc: Melissa Stafford Jones
Director, Children and Youth Behavioral Health
Initiative
California Health and Human Services Agency
1215 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Advancing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health in 2022 and Beyond through the FY 2022-2023 Budget

Dear Governor, Madam pro Tempore, and Mr. Speaker:

We appreciate the Administration's investments to improve the health and wellbeing of California's children and youth, including through the historic \$4 billion investment in the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI). However, without a clear plan or dedicated funding, the CYBHI will miss serving the critical needs of infants and toddlers and forgo upstream prevention and early intervention, as the majority of funding directed to programs relies on partnerships with K-12 schools and higher education. **In partnership with our legislative champions Senator Josh Newman and Assemblymember Marc Levine, we are requesting a one-time \$250 million General Fund appropriation over four years to support infant and early childhood mental health services and provider training.**

As the state moves forward in historically transforming and expanding children's mental health services, it is vital to consider the landscape of California's early childhood mental health. Conditions created and exacerbated by the pandemic, such as poor and declining health, and inequitable healthcare access, isolation, economic stress, and community trauma, are all proven to negatively impact a child's ability to thrive, especially in low-income and communities of color hit hardest by the pandemic. It is especially critical to address trauma, mental, and behavioral health concerns in early childhood, as 90% of a child's brain development occurs before age 5. Young children are also uniquely dependent on their caregivers to meet their social-emotional needs, so interventions must focus on caregivers to provide a nurturing, loving relationship that encourages the child's social-emotional growth and supports the foundational brain development that will enable them to flourish.

In community-based programs, care and support are delivered in spaces that children and their families frequent, allowing families to play an active role in their delivery. Community-based services are distinct from clinical mental health services, such as the new dyadic care Medi-Cal benefit, which, in addition to community-based services, are an essential part of the mental

health system for young children. Services at the community level might look like facilitated playgroups, parenting support classes, and/or mental health consultation for early care and education providers, among others. As the CYBHI envisions a mental health ecosystem for children, we must consider community-based programs as essential preventive care and early intervention.

Community-based programs are most likely to reach families from historically marginalized communities, including immigrant families, low-income families, and families of color. These are the communities who experience the most barriers to attending primary or pediatric care visits. Children under age 5 comprise 23% of the young people ages 0 to 21 enrolled in Medi-Cal; yet, they do not receive a proportional share of health and mental health care. This is despite the evidence that 43% of young children have already experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). We must meet our most marginalized families where they are by bringing services to them, especially services preventing toxic stress and future mental health conditions.

To meet the State's goal of reducing ACEs and toxic stress by half within one generation and to advance the Governor's and legislature's commitment to improving the mental health of our state's children and youth, the CYBHI must include funding to support the social emotional health of children ages 0 to 5 with an upstream, multi-systems, whole-child, whole-family approach to child, family, and community-wellbeing.

For these reasons, we the undersigned are requesting a one-time \$250 million General Fund appropriation over four years in the upcoming 2022-23 State Budget to support infant and early childhood mental health services and provider training through expansion of the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative.

Sincerely,

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