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June 10, 2022

The Honorable Jim Wood  
Chair, Assembly Health Committee  
1021 N Street, Room 390  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 1019 (Gonzalez): Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans: Mental Health – SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Wood:

On behalf of The Children's Partnership, I am writing in **SUPPORT** of **Senate Bill (SB) 1019** (Gonzalez). This bill will require Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans (MCP's) to conduct annual outreach and provide culturally and linguistically relevant education and materials to members and primary care physicians. This bill also addresses the disparities in access to timely mental health services under Medi-Cal plans by requiring health plans to communicate to beneficiaries in culturally appropriate ways how to find a provider and how to seek assistance with navigating mental health services. Barriers to mental health continue to be pervasive throughout health care, particularly for children's mental health services, and California's leaders must do more to reduce race-based disparities and give children and youth the health care they deserve.

The Children's Partnership (TCP) is a California-based children's advocacy organization that advances child health equity through public policy, community engagement, and research. We envision a California where all children, no matter their background, have the resources and opportunities they need to be healthy and thrive. Since 1993, TCP has been a leading voice for children and a critical resource for communities across California and the nation, working every day to champion policies that provide all children with the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

Medi-Cal plays a vital role in facilitating access to the services needed to support the mental health of our state's children and youth. Yet, we know that even prior to the pandemic's mental health crisis for children, California ranked 38th in the nation in children's unmet mental health needs. However, this bill acknowledges the need for direct outreach and education from managed care plans (MCPs) to not only families but also mental health service providers. If parents and caretakers do not know about or how to access their Medi-Cal mental health benefits, children and youth with mental health needs will continue to go unmet.

The need for children and youth mental health services is also not spread proportionally across children and communities. Children under the age of 5 comprise 23% of those aged 0 to 21

enrolled in Medi-Cal; yet, they do not receive a proportional share of health and mental health care. Data from our latest fact sheet focused on the health and well-being of Black children from our series, "[A Child is a Child](#)" showed that in California 61% Black children and youth rely on Medi-Cal compared to 49% of all children. Data from our fact sheet focused on the health of Latinx children highlighted that 59% of Latinx children, youth and young adults under 21 in California are enrolled in Medi-Cal. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated the pre-existing mental health crisis youth are facing, making it more urgent than ever to ensure families on Medi-Cal know about and can readily access their mental health benefits. The [California Department of Public Health](#) released data that highlighted youth ages 10-18, girls, Latinx and Black youth have all experienced an increase in suicides as compared to adults, non-Black, non-Latinx youth and boys.

Now more than ever, California must address these disparities by informing families of color of their benefits to mental health care under Medi-Cal, while pushing systemic changes within mental health in Medi-Cal managed care health plans through parallel efforts like Cal-AIM and the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative. We are encouraged by the Assemblymember's commitment to children's health and believe that SB 1019 represents an essential investment in reducing disparities in mental health care for families, children, and youth of color in California.

For these reasons, The Children's Partnership strongly supports SB 1019 and urges your Aye vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AMV", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Angela M. Vázquez, MSW  
Policy Director, Mental Health  
The Children's Partnership