March 25, 2025

The Honorable Senator Sasha Renée Pérez
Chair, Senate Education Committee
1021 O Street, Room 6740
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support Letter for SB 531 (Rubio) Student Mental Health Education

Dear Senator Pérez,

Our organizations are proud to support Senate Bill 531 by Senator Susan Rubio.

SB 531 will help empower young Californians and destigmatize mental health challenges by requiring all California students in grades 1-12 be provided with an age-appropriate mental health education.

From the aftereffects of the COVID 19 pandemic, the pervasiveness of social media, and the rise in school threats, to the current fears and traumas California students are experiencing because of recent wildfires and changes in immigration policy, today's students are confronted by an unprecedented scope of mental health challenges. Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14. Worldwide, mental health challenges are among the leading

causes of illness and disability among young people, and in California, about one-third of adolescents have experienced psychological distress.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, anxiety problems, behavior disorders, and depressions are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children – and among children ages 3-17 with a current mental health condition, only 53% received treatment or counseling from a mental health professional in the past year. There are gaps in treatment to support youth: 20% of adolescents age 12-17 report having unmet mental health care needs, and 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year. 20% of high school students reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year.

Health literacy, including mental health literacy, can serve as both a risk and protective factor for health and well-being. Mental health education is critical to building knowledge and skills to increase awareness, tackle stigma, and encourage help-seeking behavior. Young people spend the majority of their time in schools, and education systems are well-positioned to play an integral role in fostering positive youth development. Schools can help cultivate non-stigmatizing, safe, and supportive environments where youth are informed and able to seek needed mental health care.

SB 531 will ensure that students receive age-appropriate mental health education in elementary, middle, and high schools by amending existing law to include age-appropriate mental health education within the existing requirement that health instruction be taught in grades 1-6, and by requiring that mental health education be taught in grades 7-12. For these reasons, we are proud to support SB 531.

Sincerely,

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Chief Executive Officer
Aldea

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Vice President, Advocacy & Strategy
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Cc: Honorable Members, Senate Education Committee
The Honorable Senator Susan Rubio