

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



® Incorporated in California

California Chapter 2 - Kern | Los Angeles | Riverside | San Bernardino
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AAP-CA Chapter 2

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**Re: AB 1969 (Gipson) K-12 Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Programs—
SUPPORT**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) California Chapter 2, which represents over 1,000 pediatricians, is in full support of AB 1969 (Gipson), which would increase access to mental health support and programming by allowing implementation of peer-to-peer mental health programs at K-12 schools.

Mental health support and prevention services are lacking for children in the state of California, and increased resources are needed to better help children and provide them with access to evidence-based support. Californian children currently lack access to the care they need, with only 30% of children who needed access to mental health care receiving it in 2018, numbers which have likely only increased with the COVID-19 pandemic, and its effects on mental health and access to care. Peer-to-peer programming has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as an evidence-based mental health model of care. Additionally, peer programming helps to decrease stigma surrounding mental illness in our pediatric population, increases connectedness by providing social connection through shared peer experiences, and can help to form sustainable strategies to improve mental health in individual children. Research has also shown that peer programming may increase feelings of hope and self-empowerment in participants, which could help our youth feel empowered as they move towards the future.

AB 1969 is a crucial step to ensure that California children have improved access to the mental health support they need by supporting community partners in creating effective peer-to-peer mental health programs in schools.

Sincerely,

Abigail Brenner, MD

AAP-CA2