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May 6, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins  
President Pro Tempore of California State  
Senate  
State Capitol, Room 205  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon  
Speaker of California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 219  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Holly Mitchell  
Chair, Committee on Budget and Fiscal  
Review  
California State Senate  
State Capitol, Room 5050  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting  
Chair, Committee on Budget  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Request for \$20 Million in Emergency Funding for Behavioral Health Supports for Students, Teachers, and School Staff – SUPPORT**

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Children's Partnership (TCP) writes in strong support of the request for \$20 million in emergency funding for behavioral health supports for students, teachers, and school staff. As detailed in the letter submitted by Assemblymember Chu on April 20<sup>th</sup>, we must ensure that our state response to the COVID-19 pandemic prioritizes the mental health of California's early learners, students and educators.

TCP is 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. Our work ensures children in the most marginalized communities have access to timely and needed health care services, including through the use of technology. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, telehealth is more important than ever in providing timely and safe access to care, particularly for mental and behavioral health services.

California, and the entire country, is in the midst of a youth mental health crisis as rates of depression, suicide and self-harm among young people have increased in recent years. Children under 5 are facing significant mental health risks during this pandemic – at a critical period where the brain is most rapidly developing and is most at risk from trauma and adverse childhood experiences. In a recent poll of 600 California parents conducted by The Education Trust West, The Children's Partnership, and other child-focused

organizations, three-in-four parents surveyed (72%) worry their child's social, emotional and cognitive development will suffer as a result of the COVID-19 crisis; and nearly all parents (994%) would like to access their child's doctor using telehealth, but less than a quarter (18%) are currently able to do so. With the added stress – and for many, trauma – of this pandemic, it is even more critical to ensure that every student in California has access to mental and behavioral health services.

This emergency funding would help equip education partners with additional resources and tools in order to address the impacts this crisis is having on the mental health of students and educators. Schools are essential to the social and emotional health of children, and their closure has and will continue to have far reaching implications for their health and wellbeing. Similarly, early learning centers are critical sources of support for young children under 5 – a critical period of development. We encourage our education leaders to include early learning centers in this emergency funding, as these resources should support students at every age, ultimately helping families navigate this crisis and its aftermath.

Of the \$20 million requested, \$19.7 million would be allocated to school districts across the state to increase the number of mental health professionals and support personnel on campuses, contract with mental health navigation/concierge services to assist families and staff free of charge, and expand the capacity of schools to deliver mental and behavioral health services via telehealth. The remaining \$300,000 would be dedicated to implementing AB 2315 (Quirk-Silva), in order to strengthen the availability of telehealth services on school campuses. Sponsored by TCP and enacted in 2018, this bill directed the Department of Education to develop guidelines for school-based mental and behavioral health care provided via telehealth, care that is especially relevant during times of crisis like what we are experiencing with COVID-19.

For these reasons, The Children's Partnership is pleased to write in strong support and asks that you approve the \$20 million request in SB 89 emergency funding for mental and behavioral health supports for students, teachers and school staff.

Sincerely,



Mayra E. Alvarez, MHA  
President

Cc: Members, Assembly Budget Committee  
Members, Senate Budget Committee  
Assemblymember Kansen Chu  
Tony Thurmond, State Superintendent, California Department of Education  
Keely Martin Bosler, Director, California Department of Finance  
Toby Ewing, Executive Director, Mental Health Services Oversight and  
Accountability Commission