



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California

The Honorable Toni Atkins  
President pro Tempore, State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon  
Speaker, State Assembly

The Honorable Holly Mitchell  
Chair, Senate Budget Committee

The Honorable Phil Ting  
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee

**RE: Emergency funding for school-based health response to COVID-19**

Dear Governor Newsom, President pro Tempore Atkins, Speaker Rendon, Senator Mitchell, and Assemblymember Ting:

We applaud your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, and your continued commitment to ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of Californians. This unprecedented crisis and the important measures taken to address it have quickly changed the lives of most California families, impacting their health, finances, education, social supports, access to services, and mental health in dramatic ways. This will inevitably have a significant impact on the health and wellness of children and youth, many of whom are experiencing protracted gaps in their access to routine health services, as well as new or worsened mental health conditions. School closures have also magnified the significant role that schools play in providing basic health needs to students – from meals to physical and behavioral health care. As we look ahead to next Fall, it is more important than ever that we ensure school environments are ready to support and prioritize children’s physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. Preparing to address the health disparities magnified by this public health crisis should be a key component of the state’s response to the pandemic. To that end, we request:

- **\$10 million in one-time, emergency funding to stabilize and increase capacity at existing school-based health centers (SBHCs) from the general operating budget; and**
- **\$10 million in one-time Proposition 98 funds for emergency grants to ensure that school environments are trauma-informed and responsive to the mental health needs of students.**

California’s SBHCs have grown to become an important part of the health care safety net, providing access to a range of important health care services for thousands of underserved children and adolescents. Many SBHCs are situated in high-needs areas that are likely to experience the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 most acutely. SBHCs are already playing a valuable role in supporting students and families during school closures and they will be a critical asset when students begin returning to school campuses. While some SBHCs are staying open during school closures (through utilizing technology such as telehealth, reducing regular hours, and offering some limited in-person health care services), many SBHCs are seeing their capacity cut back considerably during this public health crisis. SBHCs need emergency recovery grants to ensure they are able to open their doors and address the expanded health care needs that students will have as they return to school campuses. We fear that, without direct support, many SBHCs will not be able to reopen and support their school communities. *A state investment of \$10 in one-time emergency funding to stabilize existing school-based health centers* will be used to create a “Recovery and Re-entry” grant program under the Public School Health Center Support Program (HSC 124174) to provide approximately 200 SBHCs with a one-time \$50,000 grant to increase capacity around student supports as they return to school. Funding would support an increase in overall utilization of the SBHCs and

increased services including well-child exams and visits, vaccines, and comprehensive screenings and interventions addressing trauma, mental health, substance use, and/or reproductive and sexual health.

Additionally, it is imperative that California allocate *\$10 million in one-time, emergency funding to help schools ensure that school-based health services and school environments are trauma-informed and responsive to the mental health needs of students*. We propose this funding be distributed to school districts by the California Department of Education (CDE) through a non-competitive grant program, with priority going to high-needs districts, such as those with large percentages of low-income students. Before this crisis, children in the United States already faced growing mental health challenges. Approximately [one in six](#) children aged 6 to 17 experienced a mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety. Many, including children of color, in poverty, and in child welfare, were not getting their mental health needs met by the systems in place. As families navigate difficult new realities, we can expect an uptick in children's mental health needs. Depending on their existing mental health resources and infrastructure and the needs of their student population, schools could use these funds to provide training to teachers and school staff on recognizing and responding to trauma, to implement evidence-based practices for creating trauma-informed school environments and building wellness and resilience, or to support access to mental health screenings and connections / referrals for individualized mental health services while students navigate transitions back to school.

While the challenges brought by COVID-19 loom large, California has an important opportunity to mitigate the negative impacts of this situation by ensuring youth have access to crucial supports and services – not only during this crisis, but also when students return to school during the 2020-21 academic year and begin the process of recovering and re-engaging in classroom learning. It is imperative for the state to ensure that children can return to a school community that has the necessary tools to help them learn and thrive without overburdening teachers.

Thank you again for your leadership during these challenging times, for your attention to the needs of children and youth, and for considering this policy recommendation as part of California's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Please contact Lisa Eisenberg at [leisenberg@schoolhealthcenters.org](mailto:leisenberg@schoolhealthcenters.org) or Jessica Maxwell at [jmaxwell@youthlaw.org](mailto:jmaxwell@youthlaw.org) if you have questions or would like to discuss this proposal further.

Respectfully,

National Center for Youth Law  
California School - Based Health Alliance  
Grace Inc. / End Child Poverty California

CC: Senator Richard Roth, Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 1  
Senator Richard Pan, Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 3  
Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1  
Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 2  
Andrea Margolis, Budget Consultant, Assembly Subcommittee 1  
Erin Gabel, Budget Consultant, Assembly Subcommittee 2  
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