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February 22, 2017

Honorable Marc Levine
California State Assembly
Capitol Building, Room 5135
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 154 (LEVINE) – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Levine:

Disability Rights California, a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, supports AB 154. This bill is scheduled for hearing in the Assembly Public Safety Committee on February 28, 2017.

This bill would allow a defendant with a mental health disability who is or has been eligible for public mental health services or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits to petition the court for a sentence that includes mental health treatment. The bill would authorize a court, if it finds that the defendant has shown that he or she meets the criteria, to order the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation or the county authority to provide specified mental health service, including placement in a residential mental health treatment facility instead of state prison or county jail, placement in a mental health program within the state prison or county jail, or preparation of a post release mental health treatment plan. The bill would provide that the defendant has the right to counsel for these proceedings.

This bill will allow a defendant, under certain circumstances, to petition the court for mental health services as part of a sentence. We support providing mental health treatment to defendants with mental health

disabilities rather than placement in prisons or jails. Prisons and jails are not therapeutic environments, whereas mental health programs are. Providing mental health placements and services will help individuals be better able to return to the community and stay there when their sentence is completed. Which means, in the long run, a financial savings for the state.

For these reasons, we support this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position on this bill.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret Johnson", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Margaret Johnson, Esq.
Advocacy Director
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Public Safety Committee
David Billingsley, Counsel, Assembly Public Safety Committee
David Sforza, Legislative Director, Office of Assembly Member Levine