



**LEGISLATION &
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March 16, 2021

Honorable Scott Wiener
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

RE: SB 221 (WIENER) as amended March 9, 2020 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Wiener:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports SB 221**. SB 221 will close a loophole in state law and regulations and establish a clear and appropriate timely access standard for follow-up appointments for mental health care and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) treatment.

Current law and regulations have been interpreted to require HMOs under the jurisdiction of the Department of Managed Health Care (DHMC) and health insurers under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Insurance (CDI) to offer enrollees initial appointments with non-physician mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) providers within ten business days, but not to establish similar standards for offering needed follow-up care from these providers.

Disability Rights California was happy to support your efforts to ensure mental health parity for MH/SUD conditions. We believe this bill advances parity efforts, and individuals experiencing MH/SUD should have timely access to care to ensure their condition does not worsen. The state should

proactively remove any arbitrary barriers to follow-up treatment, given the delicate nature of various MH/SUD conditions.

Compassionate and effective mental health and substance use disorder treatment relies on ongoing and consistent courses of treatment. However, it is common for patients to wait more than 4 weeks for a follow-up appointment for clinically appropriate treatment.

In the past year, the Covid-19 pandemic has upended our daily lives and increased the incidence of anxiety and depression in our communities. Moreover, during the pandemic even more than before, California's challenges in addressing problems of homelessness and housing, education and criminal justice are being exacerbated by the lack of timely follow-up treatment for MH/SUD patients who desperately need it. Expanding timely access to MH/SUD services over the full course of treatment that patients require for healing must be one of California's highest priorities.

SB 221 is consistent with and complementary to last year's groundbreaking mental health parity legislation, SB 855, and will ensure California's continued national leadership on these issues. For these reasons, DRC supports SB 221. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Cramer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gregory Cramer
Senior Legislative Advocate
Disability Rights California

Cc: Angela Hill, Legislative Director