



**LEGISLATION AND
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March 3, 2021

Honorable Connie Levya
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 4061
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 224 (Portantino) as introduced January 14, 2021 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Portantino:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 224** which would ensure that California students receive crucial mental health education.

Children and youth are experiencing escalating mental health needs, and face numerous barriers to accessing care and support. According to the most recent Commonwealth Fund Scorecard on State Health System Performance, California ranks 48th in the nation for providing children with needed mental health care. Early data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating children's mental health needs. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that beginning in April 2020, the proportion of mental-health related emergency department visits among all pediatric emergency department visits increased by 24% for children ages 5-11 and by 31% for children ages 12-17.

Now more than ever, it is critical that California equip all of its students with the information and tools necessary to promote positive mental health, and to seek mental health support and treatment when needed. SB 224 will ensure that students receive mental health education from a qualified

instructor at least once during elementary school, once during middle school, and once during high school. This education will help increase awareness, empower students to seek support, and reduce the stigma associated with experiencing mental health challenges.

For these reasons, DRC supports SB 224. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Cramer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Gregory Cramer
Senior Legislative Advocate
Disability Rights California