



California Behavioral Health Planning Council

ADVOCACY • EVALUATION • INCLUSION

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June 12, 2026

The Honorable Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

Senate Education Committee

1021 O Street, Suite 6740

Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 2003 – Pupil health: suicide prevention.

Dear Senator Pérez:

On behalf of the California Behavioral Health Planning Council (CBHPC), I am writing to express our support for Assembly Bill (AB) 2003 (Berman).

As California's behavioral health planning council mandated in Public Law 102-321 to exist, we have a responsibility to advocate for persons with lived experience of serious mental illness. We also serve as an advisory body to the Department of Health Care Services and the Legislature on Behavioral Health policies and priorities, as outlined in Welfare and Institutions Code §§ 5771 and 5772. Our diverse membership includes individuals with lived experience of serious mental illness and substance use disorders, family members, parents of children with serious emotional disturbances, service providers, professionals, and representatives from state departments whose work intersects with California's behavioral health system. These perspectives inform and shape our policy recommendations.

AB 2003 would require the Commission for Behavioral Health (Commission), in consultation with the California Department of Education and the California Department of Public Health, to develop a free, permanent statewide online suicide prevention training program for students ages 13 and older, Kindergarten through 12th grade school staff including teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents. The bill would not create additional state costs, as the Commission plans to use existing Behavioral Health Student Services Act administrative funds to develop and implement the statewide training.



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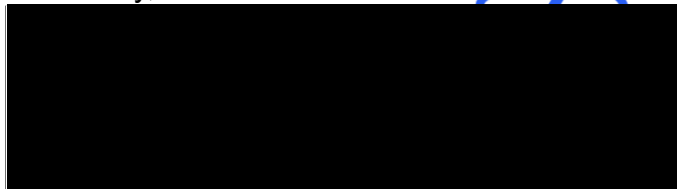
Approximately half of all lifetime mental health conditions emerge by age 14, with depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders among the most prevalent conditions for adolescents. In California, about 30 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 report symptoms that meet the criteria for serious psychological distress and nearly the same proportion experience chronic sadness or hopelessness¹. These risk factors contribute to the increased vulnerability for suicidality among young people, for whom suicide is the second leading cause of death. Furthermore, overall suicide rates have increased by 8.3% over the last two decades, underscoring the critical need for a sustained spectrum of mental health services focused on prevention and early intervention.

Outside of their home, youth spend most of their time in school, interacting daily with peers, teachers, and other school personnel. As a result, education systems are uniquely positioned to identify and support students who may be experiencing distress or suicidal ideation, and to work with families to ensure timely access to appropriate care.

AB 2003 would provide an accessible, trauma-informed, and culturally and linguistically competent suicide prevention tool for parents, caregivers, and education systems. It would give students' support networks with the knowledge and confidence to recognize early warning signs and respond effectively, strengthening early-intervention efforts and reducing the risk of fatal outcomes.

For these reasons, the Council supports AB 2003. If you have any questions, please contact Jenny Bayardo, Executive Officer, at (916) 750-3778 or via e-mail at Jenny.Bayardo@cbhpc.dhcs.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Tony Vartan
Chairperson

¹ Mustala, S., Cha, P., & McConville, S. (2026, January). *Teen mental health and school-based services in California*. Public Policy Institute of California.
<https://www.ppic.org/publication/teen-mental-health-and-school-based-services-in-california/>



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cc: The Honorable Marc Berman
Honorable Members, Senate Education Committee
Ellen Hou Green, Legislative Director
Kendra Zoller, Deputy Director of Legislative and External Affairs,
Commission for Behavioral Health
Danny Thirakul, Public Policy Coordinator, California Youth
Empowerment Network