



September 14, 2021

**VIA Email to the Office of the Governor and Author**

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 309 (Gabriel) – Pupil mental health: model referral protocols – REQUEST FOR GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE**

Dear Governor Newsom:

**The League of Women Voters of California writes to request your signature on AB 309 (Gabriel)**, which would require the State Department of Education to develop model referral protocols for addressing pupil mental health concerns. We applaud the fact that the bill would require the department to consult with various entities in developing the protocols, including current classroom teachers, administrators, pupils, and parents. It is important that the referral protocols will be easily accessible on the Department website.

According to the CDC, even prior to the pandemic the incidence of youth mental health crises was increasing at an alarming rate. Suicide rates among youth ages 10-24 increased over 57 percent between 2007 and 2018, and as of 2018 suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 15-19. The League of Women Voters of California supports programs at all levels of community and government that promote the well-being and ensure the safety of all children.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for school-based health and mental health services.** The American Academy of Pediatrics noted in recent guidance that “emotional and behavioral health challenges were of growing concern before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health emergency has only exacerbated these challenges.” Research suggests that nearly half of all children with emotional or behavioral health difficulties receive no mental health services. Among the few children and youth who do receive mental health services, most do so at school. A statewide survey found that 70.8 percent of California children identified with mental health needs did not

receive treatment.

School psychologists typically carry very heavy caseloads and find the overwhelming majority of their time is spent in IEP related activities - meetings, documentation, and supervision – leaving little or no time for mental health counseling or interventions. Teachers and other school staff are often on the “front lines” when a child presents with behavior that indicates a need for mental health support or treatment. This bill seeks to provide those staff members with critical guidance so that they respond appropriately to the child’s needs.

**For these reasons, the League of Women Voters of California strongly supports AB 309 and requests your signature. Thank you.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carol Moon Goldberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Carol Moon Goldberg  
President