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Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
P.O. Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Re: AB 727 (Nazarian): Mental Health Services Act: Housing Assistance (Support)

Dear Dr. Smith:

The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) voted at the CCLHO Board meeting on April 6, 2017 to take a Support recommendation on AB 727 (Nazarian), a bill that would clarify that counties in California may spend Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds on housing assistance for target populations of MHSA funded programs, including programs that serve children with serious emotional disturbances and adolescents and adults with serious mental disorders. Five programs/services are provided under MHSA of which only two currently offer housing assistance. This bill would expand the availability of housing assistance for individuals with serious mental illness.

Stable housing positively impacts health, and the combination of stable and secure housing with supportive services is increasingly recognized as an effective health intervention for vulnerable populations, including those who are homeless. AB 727 is consistent with the evidence-based practice of offering "housing first" when engaging individuals who are or are at-risk of homelessness. Housing is also a key factor in the recovery and rehabilitation of clients who live with serious mental health issues. This bill would help close an existing current gap in the continuum of care for the most vulnerable, by extending the availability of housing assistance to individuals with serious mental illness, regardless of which level of programs/services they participate in.

As you are aware, CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now the California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, and commissions, as well as officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

This position of support for expanding the availability of housing assistance is consistent with CCLHO's strategic priority of taking a leadership role in the practice of public health and policy development. It is further consistent with the legislative priority of providing recommendations on population-based issues that affect the health of vulnerable populations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Ken.Cutler@co.nevada.ca.us or at 530-265-7154.

Sincerely and on behalf of the CCLHO membership,

Ken Cutler, MD, MPH
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers

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