

July 3, 2019

The Honorable Shirley Weber, PhD
California State Assembly
California State Capitol, Room 3123
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
California State Assembly
California State Capitol, Room 5160
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assembly Members Weber and Wicks:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I write in support of Assembly Concurrent Resolution 98 (ACR 98), “Relative to mental health and substance use treatment.” The AMA strongly supports ACR 98’s focus on increasing efforts to increase oversight and enforcement of the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA), as well as applicable state law.

In a statement earlier this year on the 10th anniversary of the MHPAEA, the AMA called on state and federal policymakers to enforce the law’s provisions to help end the opioid epidemic. “As we strive to improve access to care and reverse the effects of the opioid epidemic, insurers need to be held accountable for complying with their legal obligations,” said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, who also is Chair of the AMA Opioid Task Force. “This means that health insurance companies must have addiction medicine and psychiatric physicians not only in the network but accepting new patients.”

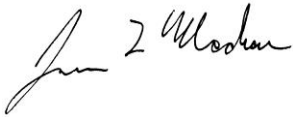
The AMA also supports ACR 98’s resolve “to use medical necessity guidelines that are fully consistent with generally accepted standards of care.” To further that effort, we strongly recommend review and use of the guidelines developed by medical societies, including the American Society of Addiction Medicine, American Psychiatric Association and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. These guidelines, unlike those commonly used by health insurance companies, will help ensure that chronic medical conditions are appropriately treated in a comprehensive, safe and effective manner.

The AMA is deeply concerned by health insurer guidelines that have been used to—as ACR 98 states—“improperly reduce the level of care for people needing mental health and substance use treatment or limit treatment coverage to only acute care, thereby denying people with chronic mental health and substance use conditions coverage of ongoing treatment.”

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Thank you for your leadership on this important public health issue. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: California Medical Association
Jack Resneck, Jr., MD