March 24, 2017

To: The Honorable Richard Pan
   Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

   Honorable Members
   Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN’S CRISIS SERVICES — OPPOSE PROPOSED FUNDING REDUCTION

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) opposes the proposed $17 million State General Fund reduction in the Governor’s budget for the development of a continuum of mental health crisis services for children and youth. The 2016-17 State Budget appropriated one-time funding totaling $30 million for crisis mental health services for children to help bring California into compliance with Federal Medicaid requirements for timely and equal access to medically-necessary services and codified the program elements in trailer bill, SB 833 (Statutes of 2016). The Governor’s proposed budget would leave just $11 million of unspent Mental Health Services Act funding to establish these life-saving programs.

County child welfare agencies serve among the most traumatized children, and are required under federal and state laws to ensure children in the foster care system receive services to promote their safety, permanency and well-being. Furthermore, foster children have an entitlement to mental health services which are medically necessary under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program under Medicaid. It is critical that foster youth have access to the full range of mental health services – from crisis services through trauma-informed therapies – readily accessible in their communities of residence.

California’s child welfare system recently completed its Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). That review found that the service array available to children to achieve permanency, specifically mental health services, were an area of needed improvement. Failure to achieve improvements in this area could result in federal fiscal penalties. In addition, access to mental health services is a critical component to the successful implementation of California’s Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) effort to reduce the use of higher level congregate care placements and allow foster children and youth to be cared for in the homes of loving families.
Crisis mental health services for children and youth will help to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, including foster families, and will divert children from hospitalization or placement into psychiatric facilities. This investment will yield savings for the State and counties, and greatly improve outcomes for children, youth and families.

For these reasons, we urge your subcommittee to reject the Governor’s proposed reduction of $17 million State General Fund for crisis mental health services.

cc: Marjorie Swartz, Office of the President Pro Tempore
    Jennifer Troia, Office of the President Pro Tempore
    Craig Cornett, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
    Scott Ogus, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
    Theresa Pena, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
    Kirk Feely, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
    Anthony Archie, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
    Luan Huynh, Office of Senator Holly Mitchell
    Bernadette Lawrence, Office of Senator Richard Pan
    Mark Newton, Legislative Analysts’ Office
    Ben Johnson, Legislative Analyst’s Office
    Michael Wilkening, Health and Human Services Agency
    Michele Baass, Health and Human Services Agency
    Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
    Will Lightbourne, California Department of Social Services
    Jennifer Kent, California Department of Health Care Services
    Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
    Kären Dickerson, California Department of Social Services
    Carol Gallegos, California Department of Health Care Services
    Kristin Shelton, HHS, Department of Finance
    Theresa Calvert, HHS, Department of Finance
    Jay Kapoor, HHS, Department of Finance
    Elizabeth Marsolais, California Association of Counties
    County Caucus