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ADVANCING BRAIN HEALTH POLICY & INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

August 21, 2018

Honorable Commissioners
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
1325 J Street, Suite 1700
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Honorable Commissioners,

The Steinberg Institute is in strong support of Santa Clara County's *headspace* Innovation Proposal. We know that the *headspace* program supports young people who are experiencing mental health issues and we applaud Santa Clara County's leadership for bringing this model to the United States.

Headspace is an early intervention program that improves the lives of young people, and their families, who are affected by brain health challenges. Developed in Australia, it is a core component of an international effort to build a culture of health for adolescents by emphasizing *early* mental health *intervention* while breaking down the stigma of accessing care *early*.

We have learned a lot over the course of the past 14 years since the inception of the Mental Health Services Act and we are convinced that we will never catch our own tail if we don't do all we can to ensure that people receive high quality care as early as possible. As with all other health issues, life changing impacts are made most effectively during the early stages of an illness. Nearly 50% of all mental health conditions have their onset by the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 24. Half of adolescents meet the criteria for having a mental health issue at some point in their early lives and we find it startling that 79% of these youth and young adults do not access care. *Headspace* will go a long way to change this unacceptable fact.

Unfortunately, California lacks a comprehensive, reliable system of care for adolescents that is easy to access and is provided in an environment that meets their unique developmental and cultural needs. This lack is creating tragic and expensive consequences in communities across the country. As a result, young people often do not reach our health, social service, or justice systems until their mental health problems have become more severe and often more difficult and costly to treat.

Please do consider supporting this innovation project. The *headspace* model takes us in an incredibly positive direction and, we believe, will prove to be a model that should be replicated throughout California.

Thank you very much.

In Partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Merritt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maggie Merritt
Executive Director

CC: Toby Ewing, Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
Toni Tullys, Santa Clara County Department of Behavioral Health
Steven Adelsheim, Stanford University