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July 30, 2019

The Honorable Julian Cyr  
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery  
State House, Room 309  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Marjorie C. Decker  
House Chair, Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery  
State House, Room 33  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: *An Act to protect children's mental health services (S. 1154/H. 1736)***

Dear Chairman Cyr and Chairwoman Decker:

Following up on the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery's recent hearing on children's mental health, trauma, and quality of care, I am writing to express my support for *An Act to protect children's mental health services* (S. 1154/H. 1736), sponsored by Senator John Keenan and Representative Elizabeth Malia. This bill would help ensure that vulnerable children across our state receive the mental health care they need.

Mental health care is crucial to ensuring a child's overall health, and the overall health and well-being of our state. Data and research show that mental illness often begins at a young age and that early diagnosis and treatment can make a difference in a child's life. We also know that removing barriers to mental health care increases the chances that children will access the services they need when they need them.

As Attorney General, I have made access to mental health care a priority of my office. My first Health Care Cost Trends and Cost Drivers report, issued pursuant to G.L. C. 6D, §8 in 2015, focused on access to behavioral health care in recognition of the importance of mental health to overall health. Late last year, my office reached an agreement with a major insurer to address behavioral health parity and improve access to behavioral health care across the state.



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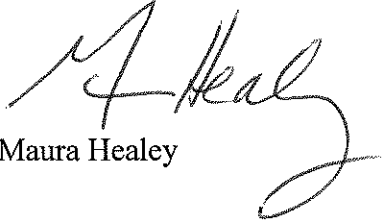
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*An Act to protect children's mental health services* is consistent with these efforts to reduce barriers to essential mental health treatment.

This legislation would help ensure that children across Massachusetts have a designated place to turn in state government when they face obstacles to accessing high quality mental health care. With the establishment of an ombuds program in the Office of the Child Advocate, children and their families would have an advocate within state government to help minimize obstacles and improve care. The ombuds program would shine a light on their needs and ensure that their questions are answered, their concerns are addressed, and the care that they need is provided. The program would also collect data and track trends to inform policymaking and other efforts.

The mental health of children in our state is critically important. I encourage you to join me in supporting *An Act to protect children's mental health services* and urge the Committee to give this legislation a favorable report. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Assistant Attorney General Angela Brooks of our Child and Youth Protection Unit at (617) 963-2590.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Healey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Maura Healey