FASD Now!
A CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE

FASD Now celebrates the passage of Senator Portantino's Special Education Bill to support students with FASD

Los Angeles, CA – On September 27, 2022, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 1016 into law. Authored by State Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – Burbank), this consequential measure will enhance special education services for thousands with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD comprises the most common, yet least recognized, neurodevelopmental disability, with a prevalence rate of approximately 5% of the general population – more than Autism and Down Syndrome combined.

Before SB1016's passage, children and youth with FASD often did not qualify for special education or qualified under other categories, preventing students from receiving educational services and support appropriate for their diagnosis. This inequity has resulted in many individuals with FASD 'falling through the cracks' of the educational system, frequently with negative outcomes, including leaving school early, employment instability, struggles to live independently, mental health challenges, arrest and/or incarceration, and insecure housing. People with FASD are disproportionately represented among chronically unhoused and 'revolving door' incarcerated people in California due to the lack of appropriate early intervention and educational supports.

"We know that through early intervention and appropriate education services individuals with FASD can achieve their full potential and lead productive lives," stated Senator Portantino. "For this reason, it's critical that we include FASD as part of special education services. Failure to do so has detrimental effects for children and their families. I am grateful to the parents in my district who highlighted this inequity and to Governor Newsom for supporting this important effort to help our children."

Advocates from FASD Now were instrumental in bringing this issue to Senator Portantino's attention and are grateful for his dedication and success in securing the passage of this legislation. FASD Now, an alliance of professionals, providers, and parent/caregivers, has been working "to expand awareness of the condition and increase both training and interventions that lead to successful outcomes and excellence in serving this population," states former Special Education professional and parent/caregiver, Christine Clifford. "We are thrilled that the passage of SB1016 opens so many avenues for individuals with FASDs, their families, and the advocacy and educational communities that support them. With the passage of SB1016, school teams and families will be able to provide an array of appropriate services and interventions addressing the challenges of this lifelong neurological condition."

With its passage, SB1016 names FASD as a distinct condition for special education eligibility under the Other Health Impairment (OHI) category and will ensure that students with FASD will receive the special educational support and services they need. FASD Now looks forward to working with the California Department of Education's Special Education Division to implement the bill, including training of staff on FASD, providing guidance on screening and assessment tools and appropriate educational interventions, and providing consultation as implementation of the law proceeds. FASD Now is also working to spotlight the current and potential role of more than a dozen other state agencies with FASD-related responsibilities related to SB1016 to promote greater interagency coordination

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