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MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION TO VOTE ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

The commission will also applaud the contributions of Senator Darrell Steinberg, who is resigning as chair.

Local leaders and the public in the mental health services community are encouraged to attend the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability's commissioner's meeting today, September 27, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and tomorrow, September 28, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Courtyard by Marriot Hotel at Cal Expo, in Sacramento. Discussion will focus on important issues surrounding California's mental health services. Included in the agenda on September 27 will be the higher education Student Mental Health Initiative.

On Friday, September 28, the commission is expected to honor Chair Senator Darrell Steinberg's contributions as a leader of mental health reform in California. Senator Steinberg announced last week he will step down from the commission saying regretfully that he doesn't feel he can give it the same level of attention as he did in the past. However, he said for him in the Senate, mental health will continue to be top priority because much more reform is needed.

"Students have unique mental health needs that are growing in scope and complexity," Senator Steinberg said. "This initiative quickly focuses resources on meeting those needs and while strengthening the relationship between educational institutions and the network of mental health resources."

Steinberg was referring to the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission's vote in June 2007 to approve \$60 million in statewide initiative funds for a Student Mental Health Initiative (SMHI) in response to the tragedy at Virginia Tech. The urgency to take steps to prevent such incidents and strengthen student mental health is undeniable.

One research study showed that nationally, nearly half of all college students report feeling so depressed at some point in time that they have trouble functioning. In addition, late adolescence and young adulthood are periods of high risk for "first break" episodes of psychosis and other major mental illnesses, as well as the onset of eating disorders and substance abuse issues.

Senator Steinberg has served on the commission since 2004, after he championed Proposition 63, which taxed the rich in order to raise funds for mental health services in California. The initiative has often been referred to as the "Robin Hood" tax for providing money for underserved groups needing mental health services.

"My involvement with Proposition 63 at all stages has been the most important and satisfying experience of my life," said Senator Steinberg. "In small and great ways, this Commission will continue to improve the lives of those living with mental illness."

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