



Youth for Neurodiversity Inc.

July 05, 2026

The Honorable Mia Bonta
Chair, Assembly Committee on Health
1021 N Street, Suite 7330
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT for AB 1626 (Gabriel): Interscholastic Athletics: Youth Sports: Coaches: Behavioral and Mental Health Training.

Dear Chair Bonta and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Youth for Neurodiversity Inc. (YND), I am writing to express our strong support for AB 1626, which strengthens behavioral and mental health training for interscholastic and youth sports coaches, including trauma-informed practices, positive team culture, and strategies for recognizing and appropriately responding to student mental health concerns.

Youth for Neurodiversity Inc. is a California-based, youth-led international nonprofit dedicated to empowering neurodivergent youth, advancing strengths-based neurodiversity, disability inclusion, and youth mental health. Our network includes more than 70 student leaders and allies with a growing focus on the experiences of neurodivergent girls.

We support AB 1626 because participation in sports provides a powerful sense of belonging, confidence, and community for youth and uplifts their mental health and wellbeing. However, many young people with ADHD, autism, and Tourette syndrome face significant barriers related to sensory processing, executive functioning, social communication, and anxiety. Without informed and supportive coaching, athletic environments can contribute to inequities in participation, belonging, and wellbeing.

Research also shows that neurodivergent and differently abled students experience higher rates of bullying, social isolation, anxiety, and depression than their neurotypical peers.¹ These inequities are reflected in youth athletics as well. California's 2026 Play Equity Report found that 42% of youth with disabilities had stopped participating in sports or physical activity within the past two years.² Coaches trained in trauma-informed practices and positive team culture can make a meaningful difference by not only continued participation but also reducing stigma around mental health and disabilities.

AB 1626 will strengthen coaches' ability to create much-needed safe, inclusive, and supportive athletic environments where all student athletes can thrive, while particularly benefiting those who have historically been misunderstood or underserved. Creating inclusive team cultures not only supports mental health but also promotes participation, resilience, and long-term success both on and off the field.

For these reasons, Youth for Neurodiversity respectfully urges the Committee to support AB 1626 and advance it toward passage. California has an opportunity to lead the nation in promoting youth mental health through inclusive, student-centered coaching practices so that no young person is forced to choose between their wellbeing and participation in the sports they love.

Thank you for your leadership on student health and success. We would be pleased to provide additional student perspectives or testimony in support of this bill as needed. I can be reached at info@youthfornd.org.

Sincerely,

Aashna Parsa

Aashna Parsa
Founder and President
Youth for Neurodiversity Inc.

¹ Newport Academy. Mental Health Challenges Faced by Neurodivergent Teens. 2025, www.newportacademy.com/resources/mental-health/neurodivergent-teens.

² LA84 Foundation, 2026 California Play Equity Report (2026), <https://digital.la84.org/digital/collection/p17103coll9/id/2011>