

# California Legislature



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Dear Ms. Everroad and Dr. Davidoff,

Access to quality mental healthcare is a major concern for our constituents and people across the State of California. As elected officials, one of our top policy priorities is to ensure that mental healthcare access and industry oversight are upheld to the highest standard. We have been troubled to learn about the Southern California Permanente Medical Group's (SCPMG) plan to implement significant reductions in the amount of time therapists will have to complete essential patient care work, such as charting and responding to urgent patient correspondence.

This decision has brought to mind the recent strike by Kaiser therapists in Northern California, which lasted for over two months in 2022, and where securing sufficient Patient Management Time (PMT) was a central concern. Thus, we find it alarming that SCPMG is proposing to reduce PMT in Southern California to just two hours per week, especially when therapists are already facing difficulties in providing adequate care with current PTM allocations.

If this proposed reduction were to proceed, it would mean that Southern California therapists will have significantly less time to perform crucial patient care tasks compared to their counterparts in Northern California. Psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, and other counselors are already grappling with limited PMT, and this further reduction would severely impede their professional integrity and their ability to provide sufficient mental health care for patients. We have also received serious concerns that this proposed PMT reduction might lead to therapists leaving SCPMG, causing longer wait times for much-needed care for patients.

In addition to the concerns surrounding the proposed PMT reductions, we have received reports indicating that Kaiser Permanente is not in compliance with California's SB 221. This law mandates insurers to provide follow-up mental health therapy sessions within 10 business days of a prior appointment, unless the patient's therapist determines that a longer wait would not be detrimental. The reports suggest that managers lack control over their schedules and are asking therapists to backdate appointments to comply with this new law, making it challenging for therapists to advocate for their patients to receive timely care, as they are legally entitled to.

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As one of the largest private providers of mental healthcare in Southern California, SCPMG's approach to these issues raises credible concerns about the quality and legality of the services being provided. We firmly believe that the most sustainable approach to ensuring excellent healthcare and complying with SB 221 is to increase staffing rather than reducing PMT. A reduction in PMT would have detrimental effects on the quality of care and therapist retention, which is not in the best interest of patients or the organization.

We strongly encourage SCPMG to take the lead in improving mental healthcare and consider following the example set by your counterparts in Northern California. Expanding PMT and responding to therapist concerns by increasing staffing would undoubtedly result in improved mental healthcare for KCPMG members. We urge you to carefully consider this approach for the betterment of mental health services in Southern California.

Thank you for your full and fair consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Sharon Quirk-Silva  
California Assemblywoman, 67<sup>th</sup> District

Dave Min  
California State Senator, 37<sup>th</sup> District

Cottie Petrie-Norris  
California Assemblywoman, 73<sup>rd</sup> District

Avelino Valencia  
California Assemblymember, 68<sup>th</sup> District