



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION**

TONY THURMOND
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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December 20, 2024

Greg Adams, Chair and CEO
Kaiser Permanente
One Kaiser Plaza, 22nd Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Via email: Gregory.a.adams@kp.org

Dear Mr. Adams:

As you are aware, California is in the midst of a mental health crisis that shows no signs of abating. As the largest HMO in our state, Kaiser Permanente has a critical role in ensuring that Californians are able to receive timely and appropriate mental health services.

That is why I am troubled by Kaiser's handling of its contract negotiations with nearly 2,400 mental health therapists, social workers, psychologists and psychiatric nurses, who have now been on strike for over seven weeks in Southern California.

In light of last year's \$200 million settlement agreement with the California Department of Managed Health Care, I expected Kaiser to take strong and decisive action to address severe understaffing and dramatically improve its mental health delivery services. It is difficult to see how Kaiser can address its deficiencies as required under the settlement agreement without providing its professionals in Southern California comparable working conditions and retirement benefits that Kaiser already provides their counterparts in Northern California, as well as salaries that are comparable to therapists who provide medical care for Kaiser.

Lack of adequate access to mental health care and addiction medicine services is a statewide problem that demands statewide solutions. As the leader of California's public school system, I know first-hand how critical mental and behavioral health services are to our students and families. That is why I have led the effort to provide \$20,000 scholarships to Californians interested in becoming school counselors and mental health workers, as well as efforts to allow school districts to bill MediCal and private insurance for school based mental health services.

Insisting that mental health professionals in Southern California have less time for critical patient care duties that cannot be done during their appointments than their counterparts in Northern California creates a two-tiered system that results in unequal and inferior care for Kaiser members in Southern California. Again, this is particularly concerning to me as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, because Kaiser Permanente is the largest

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health care provider in the state for school employees, including thousands of school employees in Southern California who meet the needs of our students daily, and who themselves are in need of timely, quality mental and behavioral health services.

I stand with Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas, State Senate President Pro Tem Mike McGuire, and dozens of Democratic legislators in calling on Kaiser to reconvene contract negotiations and accept the Union's reasonable proposals to ensure the delivery of timely and appropriate behavioral health services to your patients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Thurmond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Tony Thurmond
California State Superintendent of Public Instruction