

SHANEKA HENSON
Legislative District 30A
Anne Arundel County

Appropriations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 8, 2021

Chair Shane E. Pendergrass
Vice Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Honorable Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, the city was thrown into crisis. The effects of displacement and destruction that the community experienced were lasting and brought to light the need for cultural competency training for first responders. Whether it is dietary restrictions, prayer needs, or cultural differences that impact the perception of interactions, every person has different needs. For example, not all cultures react to pain in the same way. While the experience of pain is universal, the way of perceiving, expressing, and controlling pain is one of these learned behaviors that, when manifested, is culture-specific. When 10,000 people were held in the New Orleans Superdome for shelter, these diverse needs became more apparent.

We want to prepare our first responders for how to handle similar situations if they were to arise. Maryland extreme weather includes tropical storms, hurricanes, severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, nor'easters, blizzards, ice storms, flooding, drought, and heat & cold waves. The Chesapeake Bay area is the 3rd most vulnerable area in the U.S. to sea level rise, behind Louisiana and South Florida. The chance for natural disasters is high and an aspect of preparation that needs to be addressed is cultural competency.

Cultural competency is defined as "the ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and faiths or religions in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each". First responders are in a unique position of interacting and serving the diverse communities of Maryland and must be equipped with the tools to empathetically interact with all cultures.

HB1276 Commissions a study on best practices for the culturally sensitive inclusion of minority communities in State and local emergency plans and management led by MEMA, additionally requiring MEMA to conduct a survey of State and local emergency management

plans to ascertain certain current emergency planning strategies and requiring MEMA to review certain emergency management plans.

The need for emergency planning that keeps pace with the State's population is critical—all of Maryland's population growth since 2000 has been due to growth in the minority population. From 2000 to 2012, the Hispanic population in Maryland has doubled (an increase in 4.4% of the total population), the Asian Population has increased by 1.9%, and the African American Population has increased by 1.2%. Our state is diversifying and first responder training needs to reflect that.

Thank you for your consideration of HB1276 and I urge your favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaneka Henson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Shaneka Henson, District 30A Delegate