



Zeke Cohen

Councilmember

Chair of the Education and Youth Committee

First District

513 City Hall • Baltimore, MD 21202 • 410-396-4821 • ZEKE.COHEN@BALTIMORECITY.GOV

February 21, 2021

Shane E. Pendergrass
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Shane E. Pendergrass,

My name is Zeke Cohen, proud sponsor of the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act, the first bill to comprehensively legislate trauma-informed care to a major city. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 915 which would establish a workgroup that will be tasked with identifying current needs and eventually developing recommendations to incentivize the retention of more mental health professionals that reflect the communities in which they serve.

Racial violence and discrimination are woven into the fabric of the United States. The way policies and laws are implemented. Disparities in education and health care. The horrible and senseless killings of Black and Brown people throughout our nation's history and into the present day have played a role in the increase of mental health problems in minority communities. Research shows that an enormous number of young people in Baltimore are repeatedly exposed to traumatic experiences that can cause deep harm, including episodes of violence, sexual abuse, mental abuse, substance abuse, and neglect. We know even one of these childhood traumas can play a profound role in a child's development and ability to lead a healthy adult life.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, Black Americans are 20% more likely to report serious psychological distress than White Americans, yet they are less likely to use mental health services. Meanwhile, in 2018 the American psychological association reported less than 10% of psychologists in the United States are comprised of black and brown clinicians.

Given the significance of mental health cases versus mental health professionals, I support House Bill 915. The workgroup it establishes can play a significant role in systemically ensuring more collegiate students have incentives that will help them pursue a mental health profession. Equally as important, the bill will work towards increasing the number of underrepresented mental health professionals in underserved communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully request the support of House Bill 915 by the House.

