

**House Bill 916 Higher Education – Programs for Behavioral Health Professionals in Primary  
and Secondary Schools – Requirements and Grant**

Appropriations Committee

March 10, 2022

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 916.

HB 916 establishes programs and requirements designed to expand the number of higher education students from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds who seek a career in behavioral health.

Research from Johns Hopkins in 2020 found that 10.4% of practicing psychiatrists identify as Black, Latino, or Native American, compared with 32.6% of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Additional data from 2015 showed 86% of the psychology workforce, 88% of the health service psychology workforce, and 81% of the academic workforce were white.<sup>2</sup> While diversity does exist within the behavioral health workforce, many BIPOC providers are employed in non-licensed, lower-level positions that lack avenues for professional advancement.<sup>3</sup>

Mental health affects all cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. Multicultural communities often face a culturally insensitive health care system, language barriers, and bias or discrimination in treatment settings. Studies have shown that minority providers are more likely to meet the needs of underserved populations and patients who share a culture and race with a provider develop a stronger therapeutic relationship with improved outcomes.<sup>4</sup> The National Academy for State Health Policy identified the prioritization of behavioral health in recruitment and retention of the health care workforce as a state-level strategy to increase BIPOC engagement, particularly by engaging middle school, high school, and community college students.<sup>3</sup>

As a multicultural state, Maryland must work to increase diversity within the behavioral health workforce to serve the needs of its residents. With the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of residents, the need for culturally diverse and appropriate care will increase in the years to come. For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 916 and urges a favorable report.

---

<sup>1</sup>Johns Hopkins Medicine, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/articles/johns-hopkins-study-shows-need-for-more-diversity-in-psychiatry>

<sup>2</sup>American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/02/datapoint>

<sup>3</sup>National Academy for State Health Policy, <https://www.nashp.org/state-strategies-to-increase-diversity-in-the-behavioral-health-workforce/#toggle-id-2-closed>

<sup>4</sup>American Hospital Association, [https://www.aha.org/system/files/hpoe/Reports-HPOE/2016/aha\\_Behavioral\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.aha.org/system/files/hpoe/Reports-HPOE/2016/aha_Behavioral_FINAL.pdf)

*For more information, please contact Emily Allen at (443) 901-1588*