



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Senator Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Senator Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
Finance Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

DATE: 03/23/2022

RE: HB0097 Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals

The MLLC supports HB0097 Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0097.

A recent report by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) indicates that behavioral health disorders treatment gaps among Hispanics remain vast.¹ This can be attributed in part to the low pool of culturally and linguistically competent providers. A four year study conducted by Dr. Alegria, Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, echoed the need to train, recruit, and support bilingual/bicultural behavioral health providers to narrow behavioral treatment gaps between communities.²

The demand for mental health support continues to increase, as more people seek mental health services to address the mental distress caused by pandemic. In order to emerge from his crisis more equitably, we must take steps to close gaps in access to behavioral health care services. Leaders need to understand the needs of the behavioral health workforce to successfully deploy services to all communities. Communities that were facing barriers to access behavioral health treatment prior to the pandemic, will need unprecedented levels of mental health support to prevent another public health crisis.

Given workforce demands, there is opportunity to tap previously unused health care talent. The creation of a workgroup is needed to further assess the current needs of the behavioral workforce, and the current enrollment of underrepresented students pursuing behavioral health careers. This will allow us to develop recruitment strategies in order to be better positioned to meet the increasing demand for culturally and linguistically competent behavioral health providers.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0097.

1. Office of Behavioral Health Equity (OBHE). (n.d.). *Double Jeopardy: COVID-19 and Behavioral Health Disparities for Black and Latino Communities in the U.S.* (Submitted by OBHE). Office of Behavioral Health Equity. Retrieved February 23, 2022, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/covid19-behavioral-health-disparities-black-latino-communities.pdf?emci=125d59be-2b93-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&emdi=7ed33923-4196-eb11-85aa-0050f237abef&ceid=7719978>
2. Alegria, Margarita. "Improving Behavioral Health For Latino Populations: Creating Positive Change". National Latino Behavioral Health Association. February 23 2022. <http://www.nlbha.org/PDFs/08052019/webinar080519.pdf>