

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 97
Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other
Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals**

**Finance
Wednesday, March 23rd 2022
1:15 p.m.**

**Lauren Lamb
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 97, which would establish a workgroup to identify and study the shortage of behavioral health professionals in the State who are Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, or otherwise underrepresented in the behavioral health profession; and assess and make recommendations on incentives or other methods to increase the number of behavioral health professionals and behavioral health students who are Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, or otherwise underrepresented in the behavioral health profession, especially in underserved communities.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students for the careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Maryland schools are facing a dire shortage of behavioral health professionals and other student support personnel as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, isolation, and pervasive racial injustice strain students' wellbeing and increase the need for appropriate support. Moreover, considerable evidence shows that students of color benefit from working with behavioral health professionals who share their identity.¹

¹ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/11/20/21121875/it-s-not-just-teachers-how-counselor-diversity-matters-for-students-of-color>.



As we continue our efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the efforts of local jurisdictions, we must approach with similar urgency the recruitment and retention of underrepresented behavioral health professionals. This legislation would bring necessary attention and resources to ensuring that students are well supported, schools are adequately staffed, and that the behavioral health professionals in Maryland schools reflect the diversity of the student body.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 97.