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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 97

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

Before the Health and Government Operations Committee
By Kathleen Hays, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc.
January 20, 2022

Chairman Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 97, which would establish a workgroup on underrepresented professionals in behavioral health.

Thanks to the great work of the Maryland General Assembly, Maryland is one of America's leading states in expanding health care. Increasing the number of Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and other underrepresented behavioral health providers is necessary to further strengthen Maryland's behavioral health system. Patients tend to prefer therapists who are of the same racial or ethnic background as them and have increased trust and satisfaction in their care when they perceive their providers are similar to them.^{1,2} Racial concordance is also associated with stronger emotional bonds and positive collaborative relationships between behavioral health providers and patients.³ House Bill 97 is an important step towards equitable behavioral health care for our Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and other underrepresented communities in Maryland.

Thank you again to the committee for your recognized efforts toward improving access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders. We urge a favorable report from the Committee on House Bill 97.

¹ Street, R. L., O'Malley, K. J., Cooper, L. A., & Haidet, P. (2008). Understanding Concordance in Patient-Physician Relationships: Personal and Ethnic Dimensions of Shared Identity. *The Annals of Family Medicine*, 6(3), 198-205. <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.821>

² Cabral, R. R., & Smith, T. B. (2011). Racial/ethnic matching of clients and therapists in mental health services: A meta-analytic review of preferences, perceptions, and outcomes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 537-554. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025266>

³ Cheng, A. W., Nakash, O., Cruz-Gonzalez, M., Fillbrunn, M. K., & Alegría, M. (2021). The association between patient-provider racial/ethnic concordance, working alliance, and length of treatment in behavioral health settings. *Psychological Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000582>