



National Association of Social Workers

March 3, 2022

House Bill 1318

Health Occupations-Mental Health Services-Cultural Competency and Diversity

Delegate Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

This bill is quite comprehensive in its effort to achieve several goals. The bill aims to make sure that our mental health licensing boards each have a minimum number of members who are from underrepresented communities and to guarantee that each professional licensed by those boards receives continuing education aimed at increasing their cultural competency and cultural humility. In addition, the bill creates two separate task forces; one which would make recommendations regarding increasing the diversity and knowledge of the mental health workforce and the other which looks at creating alternative pathways for licensure. Finally, this bill provides additional resources for loan forgiveness to these professionals serving the public good and specifying that a significant portion of those funds be set aside for persons of color and members of an underrepresented community.

The Maryland Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers fully supports the aims of this bill. In fact, we have a workforce task force which is specifically dealing with many of the issues targeted in this proposed legislation. We have been advocating this session for additional funds to assist graduates with the crushing student debt accrued in an effort to prepare for these essential public service positions. In 2021 one of our chapter's committees (SWUR-Social Workers Unravelling Racism) petitioned the Board of Social Work Examiners to require continuing education for all social workers in cultural competency and anti-racism. The BSWE received this recommendation and has been working with us toward a requirement for 3 CEs each renewal period. And finally, we also recognize the fact that the use of national licensing exams as the only method of determining a person's fitness to practice eliminates some excellent candidates from our profession.

In the event that this bill does not pass in its entirety, NASW MD would be interested in working with the bill sponsor and any working group to consider the issues at hand and work toward solutions.

We urge you to give HB 1318 a favorable report. Thank you.

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