

Written Testimony

Bill HB982 - Health Occupations – Faith–Based Counseling – Exemption

My name is Apostle Abraham Shanklin, Jr. representing The Center of Transformation headquartered in West Anne Arundel County. I have a PhD in Clinical Christian Counseling and provide pastoral counseling to the congregants in my local church and local community. A Board-Certified Belief Therapist and member of the United Black Clergy of Anne Arundel County

I greet everyone on the Health and Government Operations Committee and this legislative body and thank you for receiving my testimony today.

I am FOR Bill HB982 - **Health Occupations – Faith–Based Counseling – Exemption**

During the pandemic, parents with children ages 5-12 reported their children showed elevated symptoms of depression (4%), anxiety (6%), and psychological stress (9%); and experienced overall worsened mental or emotional health (22%) and it has been felt through social determinants such as social isolation, remote learning and the fear of the virus.

The statics are real for me as a frontline worker intervening and interacting with a population that has been gravely impacted by this COVID pandemic - the youth. The mental health conditions of the youth in my congregation and community goes under reported because the dots are not being connected. I have seen the impact of COVID on the academic and social welfare of kids that has translated into lasting trauma for what I believe will be for years to come.

We are not just talking about missed classroom interactions with their teacher, sports participation, or even social functions alone, but real fear and sadness.

Often times parents have not reached out to a professional counselor or therapist but go directly to their local pastor/faith leader first.

Faith has played a major role pre-pandemic and I believe and even greater role post pandemic. This bill will help to fill in the gaps as frontline workers being trained by Biblical therapists connected to a network of professional counselors. That network allows us to talk about the grief, depression, and sadness increased by COVID, but at the same time allows us to refer up serious matters such as abuse, PTSD, or other diagnosable issues that children and adults face. I and others are well versed in reporting standards among youth and adults when it comes down to any form of abuse. This bill will help provide the circle of care and other wrap around Mental Health support that our communities need. We can be a partner with the multitude of clinicians and professionals who are providing the great support brought by this pandemic. It's all hands on deck for this one!

Again, I am for Bill HB982 **Health Occupations – Faith–Based Counseling – Exemption**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.