



# Montgomery County

## Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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**HB 1318**

**DATE: March 1, 2022**

**SPONSOR: Delegate Smith**

**ASSIGNED TO: Health & Government Operations**

**CONTACT PERSON: Leslie Frey** (leslie.frey@montgomerycountymd.gov)

**POSITION: SUPPORT (Department of Health and Human Services)**

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### **Health Occupations - Mental Health Services - Cultural Competency and Diversity**

House Bill 1318 requires the State Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists, the State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, and the State Board of Social Work Examiners to have at least three members who are represent persons of color or are not represented in the majority with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or physical ability. The bill also requires professional licensed by these boards to compete continuing education hours in cultural competency, and establishes the Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force.

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS) strongly supports House Bill 1318 because of the need to improve access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental and behavioral health providers for residents across the state. There is a shortage of such providers which has resulted in long wait times for residents to access mental health care from providers who share common cultural backgrounds or who speak languages preferred by those seeking mental health treatment. Research has shown that "[c]ultural and linguistic competence in the delivery of mental health services can have a profound effect on access to and quality of care among ethnic/racial minorities. Vital for the delivery of such services is a diverse workforce that also represents the population."<sup>1</sup>(Internal citations omitted).

The Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland, a program of Montgomery County government and part of the national "Welcome Back Center Initiative"<sup>2</sup>, could be a valuable resource to the Task Force created by House Bill 1318, as it is uniquely positioned to provide expertise about the experience of foreign-trained health professionals in attaining educational and licensure credentialing in Maryland and the challenges these professionals face that all too often keep them from practicing in their fields of training. We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1318 and consider stakeholder resources such as the Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland when undertaking this important work.

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<sup>1</sup> Marquine, MJ and Jimenez, D. *Cultural and linguistic proficiency in mental health care: a crucial aspect of professional competence*. Int Psychogeriatr. 2020 Jan; 32(1): 1–3. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7755080/>

<sup>2</sup> The Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland is an innovative model that builds on the personal and professional assets of immigrants living in the United States to: further address health professional shortages; diversify the health workforce; provide economic opportunities to underutilized individuals as they return to work in the health field; and enhance health outcomes of the entire community. In 2006, the Latino Health Initiative (Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services) launched The Foreign-Trained Health Professionals Program to facilitate the Maryland health professions licensure process. In 2010, this program became the "Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland," one of several centers comprising the national "Welcome Back Initiative" network. The center provides a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach to effectively address the needs and decrease the challenges and barriers foreign-trained health professionals encounter in Maryland in obtaining their licenses. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Program.aspx?id=OCA/OCAWelcomeB-p482.html>