



Maryland  
Hospital Association

**House Bill 1318 - Health Occupations - Mental Health Services - Cultural Competency and Diversity**

**Position: *Support***

March 3, 2022

House Health & Government Operations Committee

**MHA Position**

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 1318.

As part of MHA's [commitment to racial equity](#), Maryland hospitals are evaluating organizational values to ensure they promote equity and inclusion. We are working with members of our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Group and Health Equity Task Force to equip hospital leaders to address race while understanding their own biases. Hospitals are committed to embracing culturally competent care to address disparities in health outcomes and ensure all Marylanders can be as healthy as possible.

HB 1318 increases cultural and social representation among several boards relating to mental health services and establishes the Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force and the Alternative Mental Health Professional Licensing Pathways Workgroup. Appropriating funds to support these efforts, including a grant program for continuing education and loan forgiveness, acknowledges the importance of creating diverse pipelines for mental health services professionals.

Maryland is experiencing a staggering health care workforce crisis, which includes the behavioral health workforce. The Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) reports that the topic of most concern raised in regional stakeholder engagement meetings is the ongoing workforce shortage, which makes it difficult to meet rising demand for services. Low salaries and high educational requirements for some roles (and related educational debt) challenge recruitment and retention. Long-term solutions will require increasing the pipeline of health care professionals. Breaking down historic barriers for certain populations to enter the profession is needed to meet the care needs of the entire population.

Implicit and explicit bias is a public health crisis. Inequities in health care access, quality, and outcomes of care harm the health of our whole community. Diverse oversight boards and workforce help reduce stigma and ensure greater equity in mental health care. Maryland hospitals support HB 1318. It is important that, as a state, we bolster and appropriately invest in our workforce. This is critical for the health care field as we look to build our future workforce and ensure all Marylanders have access to the care they need.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on HB 1318.

For more information, please contact:  
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