

SHANEKA HENSON
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Appropriations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2022

Chair: Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass

Vice Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

Health and Government Operations Committee

241, House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and esteemed colleagues of the Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to bring forth. **HB0982, Health Occupations - Faith-Based Counseling-Exemption.** The purpose of this bill is to legalize a currently unforced illegal practice, by allowing members of the clergy and other faith based practitioners to provide religious counseling.

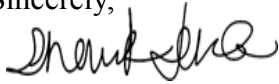
Faith based organizations have been on the frontline for years, meeting people where they are. This has included providing emotional and family therapy using a principled counseling model, where communities have a safe place to share the various perplexities of life. This bill is not meant to replace the role of licensed professional counselors, but to provide them an additional partner in services they provide to persons in their care.

We are in a time where an increasing amount of people are in need of counseling. Many of them are pursuing their counseling through their churches or other religious institutions. This bill will allow a legal pathway for faith based practitioners to provide the needed services. Ultimately this benefits all Marylanders by lightening the burden being carried by License Counselors, while not lessening the valuable role they play in our society.

HB0982 serves as a benefit to licensed professionals, especially those who are treating a religious patient, as this bill will allow them to partner with a faith counselor from their religious tradition and or background to partner in the best care for their patient.

Thank you for considering HB0982. I look forward to divulging in greater detail the simplicity and values this bill carries to cultivate relationships between licensed counselors and other faith-based organizations to ensure a continuum of care for our constituents in need. I appreciate you allowing me to bring this bill before you, and ask for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaneka Henson", written in a cursive style.

Delegate Shaneka Henson