



March 3, 2022

House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT
HB 1318 -Mental Health Services- Cultural Competency and Diversity

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore is pleased to support HB 1318- Health Occupations-Mental Health Services-Cultural Competency and Diversity This bill 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 from underrepresented communities and requiring certain professional counselors and therapists, psychologists, psychology assistants, and social workers to complete a certain number of continuing education unit hours in cultural competency. In addition, it establishes the Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force.

Studies show there are several barriers to quality care for underrepresented communities. They include lack of diversity among mental health care providers, language barriers and lack of culturally competent providers. In addition, lack of cultural understanding by health care providers may contribute to underdiagnosis and/or misdiagnosis of mental illness in people from racially/ethnically diverse populations. Factors that contribute to these kinds of misdiagnoses include language differences between patient and provider, stigma of mental illness among minority groups, and cultural presentation of symptoms.¹

Maryland’s Public Behavioral Health System is a nationally recognized model; however, many communities, in particular black and brown communities, still face barriers to accessing care due to the lack of available providers. With increasing demand for services, people are experiencing long delays for receiving care due to the lack of available and culturally diverse behavioral health providers. BHSB supports HB 1318 as we recognize the critical need to eliminate the disparities and improve access to behavioral health care for underrepresented communities.

Maryland must address the behavioral health workforce shortage, and increase racial, ethnic and gender diversity in the behavioral health field. The lack of diverse mental health professionals makes it difficult for communities of color to get adequate care. HB 1318 is a step towards implementing solutions to increase access to appropriate mental health support and care for diverse communities. **As such, BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee support HB 1318**

¹ American Psychiatric Association. “Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations” Fact Sheet. [African American Patients \(psychiatry.org\)](https://www.psychiatry.org/patients)