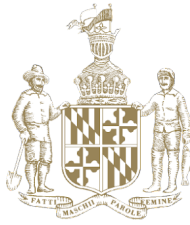


STEPHANIE SMITH
Legislative District 45
Baltimore City

Appropriations Committee

House Chair
Baltimore City Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3486 · 301-858-3486
800-492-7122 Ext. 3486
Stephanie.Smith@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB1318: Health Occupations - Mental Health Services - Cultural Competency
and Diversity**

Bill Hearing: March 3rd, 2022, 1:30pm, Health and Government Operations Committee

Chairwoman Shane E. Pendergrass, Vice Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, and members of the committee,

In 2021, the Minnesota state legislature passed groundbreaking legislation to strengthen the diversity and cultural competence of the mental health workforce. Receiving robust and unyielding bipartisan support, the government of Minnesota was able to support a thriving mental health field with representation from all minority and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) groups.

While the entirety of Americans struggle in an ever-changing environment of widespread tragedy and day-to-day anxiety alike, it is increasingly important to ensure that the mental health workforce is accessible and welcoming to employees from underrepresented communities, creating the same encouraging atmosphere for clientele. In the incredibly diverse state of Maryland, we find an even higher need for mental health employees who have a comprehensive understanding of diversity, both from formal education and personal experience, in order to address the needs of all communities. These needs must be fulfilled through educational opportunities and requirements, as well as quotas of inclusion. In addition, we must develop task force groups to study the barriers to this field that place members of minority groups at a disadvantage.

HB1318 seeks to:

- Require 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 a certain number of members who are from underrepresented communities
- Require certain professional counselors and therapists, psychologists, psychology assistants, and social workers to complete a certain number of continuing education unit hours in cultural competency
- Establish the Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force
- Establish the Alternative Mental Health Professional Licensing Pathways Workgroup
- Require the Governor to appropriate certain funds in certain fiscal years to staff the Task Force
- Establish a grant program to provide certain continuing education
- Provide loan forgiveness under the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program

In establishing these programs, grants, and educational opportunities, we as legislators will move closer to fulfilling our duty to represent and serve the needs of ***all*** constituents.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote favorably on HB1318.

Sincerely,

Delegate Stephanie M. Smith