

March 1, 2022

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

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI fights for policies to ensure people get the best possible care. About one in five Americans experience a mental health condition, but only half receive treatment. People with mental health conditions should have access to health care coverage that is affordable and includes parity for mental health so they can get appropriate care as early as possible.

In Maryland the best care comes from providers who understand the communities they serve. Maryland is a diverse state and clinicians will increasingly see patients with a broad range of perspectives regarding health, often influenced by their social or cultural backgrounds. Research has shown that provider patient communication is linked to patient satisfaction, adherence to medical instructions, and health outcomes.

Cultural competence has gained attention from health care policymakers, providers, insurers, and educators as a strategy to improve quality and eliminate racial/ethnic disparities in health care. The goal of cultural competence is to create a health care system and workforce that are capable of delivering the highest quality care to every patient regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or language proficiency. Bringing this to fruition requires action by various health care sectors, each with different motivations, approaches, and leverage points for advancing this field. Cultural competence aims to change a “one size fits all” health care system to one that is more responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse patient population. NAMI Maryland supports these proposed requirements.

HB 1318 would also change mental health related occupations boards by requiring a more equitable make up of board members, which means mental health leadership from the top down will better understand the challenges and opportunities that exist in communities across the state.

Finally, the bill directs the state to establish two bodies responsible for breaking down barriers to providers of color and putting an increased emphasis on cultural competence in Maryland.

This legislation will push Maryland towards progress on greater diversity of mental health professionals and ensuring that all Maryland mental health providers are appropriately trained to offer their patients the best care possible. For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on **HB 1318**.