

House Bill 911 Health Occupations - Psychologists - Doctoral Degrees

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 24, 2022

Position: SUPPORT WITH SPONSOR AMENDMENT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 911 with the sponsor amendment.

HB 911 (with the sponsor amendment) amends the Health Occupations Article to recognize, for purposes of licensure by the State Board of Psychologists, a practice-oriented postdoctoral respecialization certificate that meets certain accreditation requirements.

This section of the Health Occupations Article – which defines the necessary doctoral training educational requirements for licensure as a psychologist – is out of date. As of June 1st, 2019, the National Register, which is a division of the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB), neither maintains a list of joint designated programs nor provides equivalency assessments for degrees falling outside of that list. The announcement that ASPPB would no longer carry out this function was made in April 2014 to allow time for state licensing laws and statutes to be changed. Guidance and suggested wording for laws, statutes, and regulations following these changes were approved and made available by ASPPB in October 2017.

Most states across the country have taken action to update their statutes, ensuring that a variety of paths to securing licensure as a psychologist – including respecialization – remain available. Maryland law, however, has not been updated to reflect these changes at the national level. The consequence is that Marylanders with Doctoral Degrees in Psychology that are not from “practice-oriented” programs have few viable pathways to receiving the licensure necessary to provide clinical services to Maryland residents. HB 911 would create such a pathway by allowing these individuals to meet the education requirements for licensure via a postdoctoral respecialization certificate in a practice-oriented program.

Maryland is contending with a mental health workforce crisis that is limiting access to care from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore. The state is home to 48 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas,¹ including 16 entire counties.² As demand for mental health care continues to increase, we must ensure our law does not preclude those willing and able to deliver care from doing so. **For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 911 and urges a favorable report.**

¹ Health Resources & Services Administration, <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

² Rural Health Information Hub, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=MD>

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865