

Written Testimony in Favor of HB 1318
Health Occupations - Mental Health Services - Cultural Competency and Diversity

Thank you Delegate Pendergrass, Delegate Pena-Melnyk, and all the members of the Health and Government Operations Committee for addressing this important issue of strengthening the cultural competency of behavioral health professionals, including social workers. The University of Maryland, School of Social Work (SSW) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of HB 1318. At the SSW, we are committed to educating and preparing a professional work force that has the knowledge, self-awareness, and practice skills to serve clients from diverse backgrounds as well as advance human rights, social, racial, and economic justice, and equity issues in the organizations and communities they serve.

While we are in support of the goals of HB 1318 to address cultural competence and below are comments concerning specific provisions identified in the bill:

1. We support the proposed requirement to require the Board of Social Work Examiners (BSWE) to have at least three board members from underrepresented communities. It is essential to have professional boards who are fully representative of the population served when making policy and practice decisions that have significant impact on underserved populations.
2. We support the requirement that social workers would complete Continuing Education Units (CEUs) in cultural competence and DEI content for license or renewal. In 2020, Social Workers across the state submitted a petition to the BSWE requesting that they add a COMAR requirement of 3 CEUs for licensing renewal in the area of cultural competence. While the BSWE voted favorably on this in April 2021, they have yet to implement this important requirement. Additionally, HB 1318 proposes 6 CEUs for every renewal period; we ask that the committee consider reducing it to 3 CEUs for license or renewal. We recommend this reduction because a social worker is already required to earn 3 CEUs in ethics content, and if a supervisor, 3 CEUs in supervision. We want social workers to have the flexibility to choose additional CEUs on topics they choose to support their work.
3. We support the establishment of a taskforce or workgroup to identify strategies to improve the cultural competence of behavioral health professionals as well as make recommendations to address the challenges facing the licensing boards. Since HB 1318 identifies many of the same members for both the *Culturally Informed and Culturally Responsive Mental Health Task Force*, and the *Alternative Mental Health Professional Licensing Pathways Workgroup*, we ask the committee to consider establishing one workgroup. This could offer more comprehensive and consistent recommendations.

Nationally, Social Workers provide the majority of behavioral health services. We thank you for your consideration of HB 1318 and your continued work to strengthen the professional workforce and improve behavioral health services throughout Maryland. We at the SSW support your efforts and welcome the opportunity to serve to promote cultural competence in behavioral health.

Respectfully submitted,



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