
BILL NO.: House Bill 455
TITLE: State Personnel – Implicit Bias Awareness Training - Required
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
DATE: February 8, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 455 would require all state employees to participate in and complete implicit bias training within six months of their hire date and on an annual basis. The trainings will include: understanding the definition of implicit bias; a requirement that each employee take a self-evaluation that measures the employee's positive or negative attitude towards a particular concept or social group; information on the impact of implicit bias on interpersonal relationships and encounters in the workplace; information on strategies to address the negative effects of implicit bias in the workplace and the performance of the employee's job; and encouraging cultural competency in the workplace. Because implicit bias exists within every individual, and can have a negative impact on those interacting with the State, the WLC supports this legislation.

Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts is important in today's increasingly diverse workplace. The State is uniquely positioned as an employer and a leader to prioritize DEI and provide training to all of its employees. Implicit bias training should raise awareness of the mental shortcuts that lead to snap judgments—often based on race and gender—about people's talents or character, thereby reducing bias in attitudes and behaviors at work, from hiring and promotion decisions to interactions with the public and colleagues. Per the Harvard Business Review, "The most effective [implicit bias] training does more than increase awareness of bias and its impact. It teaches attendees to manage their biases, change their behavior, and track their progress. It gives them information that contradicts stereotypes and allows them to connect with people whose experiences are different from theirs. And it's not just a onetime education session; it entails a longer journey and structural changes to policies and operations."¹ HB 455 does that by requiring not just that employees be trained in understanding that implicit exists, but, importantly, also teaching strategies for negating those biases, and making it an on-going process throughout employment.

Unconscious gender bias remains a significant barrier to women in the workforce and throughout society; it also remains difficult to identify and prevent. While implicit bias training will not solve all of society's ills, it is an important step towards a systemic approach necessary to address discrimination and inequities. As such, the WLC urges a favorable report on HB 455.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.

¹ *Unconscious Bias Training That Works*, Harvard Business Review, September 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/09/unconscious-bias-training-that-works>