



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 16, 2023

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 615 – Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals - Extension of Dates – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support for House Bill (HB) 615 – Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals - Extension of Dates. Chapter 318 of the Acts of 2022 established the Workgroup on Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Other Underrepresented Behavioral Health Professionals (the Workgroup). The Workgroup is tasked to identify and study the shortage of behavioral health professionals in the State who are Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islanders, or otherwise underrepresented in the behavioral health profession. The Workgroup is also tasked to assess and make recommendations on incentives or other methods to increase the number of students and behavioral health professionals who are Black, Latino, Asian American Pacific Islanders, or otherwise underrepresented in the behavioral health profession who provide behavioral health services in the State, especially in underserved communities. The Workgroup is required to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before July 1, 2023.

MDH supports the extension of timelines for implementation and subsequent final report outlined in HB 615. This extension will allow time to fill all membership seats and provide adequate time to thoroughly study the issues and make recommendations. Workforce problems have an impact on almost every aspect of prevention and treatment across all sectors of the diverse behavioral health field. The issues encompass difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff; the absence of career ladders for employees; marginal wages and benefits; limited access to relevant and effective training; the erosion of supervision; a vacuum with respect to future leaders; and financing systems that place enormous burdens on the workforce to meet high levels of demand with inadequate resources. In addition, the workforce lacks the racial diversity of the populations it serves and is far too often insensitive to the needs of individuals affected by ethnicity, culture, and language.

The Workgroup can further our efforts in building a more equitable system of care that focuses on improving cultural and linguistic competencies with the expansion of a diverse workforce that has been underrepresented in the behavioral health community.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "LH Scott".

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary