



February 24, 2026

**OFFICERS OF THE BOARD**

***President***

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

***President-Elect***

Peter Smith, Psy.D.

***Past President***

Brian Corrado, Psy.D.

***Secretary***

Kim Sanschagrín JD, Ph.D.

***Treasurer***

Andrea Chisolm, Ph.D.

***Representatives-at-large***

Deborah Williams, Psy.D.

Laurie Donze, Ph.D.

***Representative to APA Council***

Mary Fernandes, Ph.D.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

***Communications***

Beatrice Gerry, Ph.D.

***Diversity***

Mindy Milstein, Ph.D.

***Early Career Psychologist***

Danielle Wexler, Ph.D.

***Educational Affairs***

Shalena Wade, Ph.D.

***Ethics***

LaShaun Williams, Psy.D.

***Legislative***

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.

***Membership***

Dana O'Brien, Ph.D.

***Past Presidents' Council***

Steve Sobelman, Ph.D.

**PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS**

**OFFICER**

Paul C. Berman, Ph.D.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Taylor Dickerson

Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair  
Delegate Kenneth Kerr, Vice Chair  
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
145 Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 1241 Labor and Employment - Bereavement Leave - Qualified Relationships

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state, asks the Finance Committee to report FAVORABLY on HB 1241.

Experiencing bereavement can be among the most vulnerable and painful psychological experiences in one's life. The ability to properly grieve a loss in accordance with one's personal, cultural, and spiritual practices is crucial to healthfully moving through the journey of loss. This requires adequate time away from other responsibilities to receive support, participate in grieving rituals, and generally navigate the complex emotional experience of bereavement. However, current law narrowly defines losses eligible for bereavement leave for employees in Maryland as a "child, spouse, or parent." In the event of a loss outside of these categories, an employee may not receive time necessary to grieve. The failure to recognize the importance of such a loss – also known in psychology as *disenfranchised grief* – can contribute to ongoing negative mental health outcomes such as complicated grief or prolonged grief disorder, which some estimate already impacts around 1 in 10 people in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Family structures in the U.S. are becoming increasingly diverse and inclusive of relatives outside of the "child, spouse, or parent" definition; "extended" family members may take the role of a parent, grandparents may be present in multigenerational households, etc. People also increasingly report having extended close relationship networks that may not fit within these narrow categories. Research further suggests that these extended kin ties can be particularly common in communities of color and LGBTQIA+ communities, creating additional equity concerns in whose grief is recognized.

Simply because a relationship falls outside a strict definition of "immediate family" does not mean an individual does not deserve the opportunity to grieve and heal. Creating a more expansive definition of "qualified relationship" ensures that people are able to use leave to receive the time and support they need to process the immediate aftermath of a loss. Doing so supports the well-being of Maryland's workforce and prevent additional costs associated with longer-term mental health concerns.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1241. If we can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D. at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com

Respectfully submitted,

*Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.*  
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.  
President

*Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.*  
Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.  
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc:

Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs

<sup>1</sup>Reiter, A., Valentine, M., Sanchez, M., Pickrell, A., & Irvin, C. (2024, October). *An Overview of Bereavement and Grief Services in the United States: Report to Congress, 2023*. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC.