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February 15, 2021

RE: Please Support Sustaining and Growing our Mental Health Workforce – HF970

Dear Distinguished Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

I am writing in support HF970: Culturally informed behavioral health training requirements and BIPOC workforce development provisions.

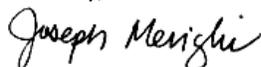
Minnesota lacks sufficient representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the mental health workforce. For example, BIPOC social workers make up about 10% of the workforce in the state¹. This disproportionately low percentage of BIPOC social workers is nearly identical for psychologists (12% in 2016), licensed marriage and family therapists (10% in 2019), licensed alcohol and drug counselors (13% in 2018), and licensed professional counselors (11% in 2018)². As the state of Minnesota continues to become more racially and ethnically diverse, having a mental health workforce that reflects this diversity is critically important.

Increasing the number of BIPOC mental health practitioners is only one piece of a complex workforce puzzle. It is also essential for the state of Minnesota to redouble its efforts so that all mental health practitioners will become culturally responsive and informed. By increasing the knowledge and skills of these practitioners with respect to clinical interventions that are attuned to cultural beliefs and practices, we will increase the likelihood of positive mental health outcomes for our BIPOC clients receiving mental health services. Some important steps to developing a workforce that is culturally responsive and informed would be to institute licensure requirements and continuing education opportunities that will ensure mental health practitioners in Minnesota have the requisite training and awareness to work across difference.

Minnesotans throughout the state would clearly benefit from an increase the in number BIPOC clinicians who provide direct and indirect services, as well as BIPOC supervisors who can train current and future practitioners in culturally responsive care. One mechanism to support this effort is to establish financial incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness) to BIPOC mental health professionals. Doing so would reduce the debt burden of these professionals and inspire more BIPOC students to pursue advanced mental health training. A tangible result of this incentive program would be a robust workforce that has much need representation from BIPOC communities.

HF970 provides a comprehensive range of strategies to build a more informed and competent mental health workforce in our state. I strongly support the efforts outlined in this bill and urge your support to invest in strengthening our mental health system and workforce for all Minnesotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions (jmerighi@umn.edu).

Sincerely,



Joseph Merighi, PhD, MSW, LISW
Associate Professor and Interim Director

¹Minnesota's Social Work Workforce (2020): <https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/workforce/mh/docs/cbsw.pdf>

²Mental and Behavioral Health Workforce Reports (n.d.): <https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/workforce/mh/index.html>