



February 15, 2021

**RE: Please support sustaining and growing our mental health workforce**

Dear Distinguished Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

As Hmong psychologists in Minnesota, we have observed the lack of representation of mental health providers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), but especially as Hmong American. Minnesota is home to upwards of 66,000 Hmong Americans. The Twin Cities has the highest concentration of Hmong people than any other state of the United States of America. Data suggests that historical events such as the Hmong diaspora, Vietnam War, refugee status, and generational gaps has the potential of increasing vulnerability to mental illnesses. In addition to historical trauma, psychosocial factors such as structural racism, health disparities, acculturation, and discrimination, all result in an even more urgent need for mental health providers who are Hmong and understand the cultural complexities embedded in our history. The mental health workforce bill HF 970 addresses this need in BIPOC and rural communities.

For those that are currently practicing in the field of mental health, there is a necessity for providers to be more culturally informed. Graduate school programs in mental health often have only one course on diversity. This one course is divided into fragmented topics ranging from feminism, ability status, LGBTQI, religion, and race/ethnicity. The structure of the one diversity course allows for a few class hours on each topic, not nearly enough to prepare mental health workers for the complexities that can come with the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. There is a serious demand to improve and increase trainings that will help current mental health providers be more culturally informed in their assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness in BIPOC communities.

As it stands, there are many barriers to becoming a licensed mental health worker. These barriers include but are not limited to the financial hardships that can come with licensing exams and the study materials needed to adequately prepare, as well as graduate school requirements that structurally excludes students who have started families and must work to support their families. Additional barriers to becoming a licensed mental health worker are addressed in the bill. Given the need for more BIPOC providers and more culturally informed mental health providers in general, a closer analysis into barriers is warranted, as stated in HF 970.

This bill provides a comprehensive array of strategies that address building a more informed, competent mental health workforce in our state. **We strongly support** the efforts outlined in this bill and urge your support to invest in strengthening our mental health system for all Minnesotans by investing in our workforce.

Thank you,

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