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HB 915 – Workgroup on Black, Latino, and Other Underrepresented Mental Health Professionals

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of House Bill 915. This bill establishes the Workgroup on Black, Latino, and Other Underrepresented Mental Health Professionals (“Workgroup”) to study the shortage of mental health professionals who are Black, Latino, or otherwise underrepresented in the profession. The bill requires the Workgroup to make recommendations on incentives or other methods to increase the number of minority mental health professionals in the state. The Workgroup is required to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor before July 1, 2022.

As part of our mission, CareFirst is committed to driving transformation of the healthcare experience with and for our members and communities, with a focus on quality, equity, affordability, and access to care. Racial and ethnic minorities experience significant disparities in behavioral health treatment and outcomes due to stress, stigma, lack of access to care, and other factors. To address these disparities, it is important to focus on improving health care workforce diversity through various channels, such as pipeline programs that recruit diverse candidates and training programs to increase linguistically and culturally competent providers.

CareFirst supports establishing the Workgroup to study the gaps in the supply of diverse mental health providers and identify impactful ways to increase the number of minority mental health professionals, strengthen access to high quality behavioral health care, and reduce health disparities in communities of color. **We respectfully request the addition of the following payer stakeholders to the membership of the Workgroup, to be appointed by the Secretary of Health:**

- **One representative of a nonprofit health service plan;**
- **One representative of a nonprofit group model health maintenance organization;**
- **One insurer; and**
- **One representative of a managed care organization.**

Including payer perspectives in discussions of provider shortages and provider recruitment will provide meaningful and substantive insight that will enrich this critical work.

CareFirst strongly supports the policy goals advanced by House Bill 915. We look forward to partnering with legislators, health departments, public health groups, and other stakeholders to advance health equity, as we deploy targeted strategies outside and within our own organization to ensure the health and wellbeing of our members, provider partners, employees, and communities.

We urge a favorable with amendments report.

About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.4 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety, and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at www.carefirst.com and our transforming healthcare page at www.carefirst.com/transformation, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).