

Good afternoon Madame Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and colleagues of the Finance Committee.

For the record, I am Delegate Sarah Wolek here to present HB1013. This bill adds licensed clinical professional counselors to the list of health care professionals who can certify illness when a state employee is seeking paid sick leave for 5 or more consecutive workdays.

There are three main reasons I am bringing the bill forward for your consideration today.

First, HB1013 aligns State employee's policies with the Health Occupations Law. Current Maryland law specifies that physicians, psychologists, social workers, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, physical therapists, podiatrists, dentists, and optometrists may certify illnesses for state employees requesting paid leave. However, licensed clinical professional counselors are not included on this list, even though they are permitted to diagnosis and treat mental health illnesses under the Health Occupations Article.

Secondly, HB1013 will ensure that state employees do not face delays in obtaining leave for mental illness. Currently if a state employee need time off because of a mental health issue, they will need to find another type of provider to certify their illness even though they may be receiving care from a licensed counselor.

Finally, HB1013 aligns with our state's efforts to recognize the importance of emotional and mental health. By recognizing the full range of practitioners who provide care in this space, we will ensure that the wellbeing of state employees is holistically being recognized and addressed.

Thank you for your consideration and I ask for a favorable report.