



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

Manufacturer's Bank Building, 12th Floor
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Michigan is home to a number of large ethnic minority populations, including Native Americans, Hispanics, and Arab Americans. Individuals and groups within these ethnic communities, as well as the Department of Mental Health, have observed that the traditional or "mainstream" mental health system has failed to provide these communities with effective, adequate mental health services even when these services are available to the general population. For non-English speaking members of these communities, language is an obvious — and virtually absolute — barrier. But even where language is not a serious barrier, the differences in cultural systems between the majority population and ethnic minorities contributes to a set of special needs on the part of minorities (especially the more recent immigrants) beyond those which might apply to the majority population.

In recognition of these special needs of ethnic minority communities, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has funded a number of ethnic minority mental health programs in Michigan and has established an Office of Multicultural Services in the department. However, the office has no statutory authority, and legislation has been introduced which would establish the office in statute.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Mental Health Code to create the Office of Multicultural Services and a 13-member advisory Committee on Multicultural Services in the Department of Mental Health (DMH). Members of the advisory committee would be appointed by the director of the department.

The bill would define "multicultural services" to mean specialized mental health services for multicultural populations. Although the bill does not define "multicultural populations," it gives as examples of such populations "African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Arab/Chaldean-Americans."

The office would be required to:

- assess the mental health needs of multicultural populations in the state;
- recommend to the director culturally and ethnically appropriate treatment methods and programs;
- help (through consultation, technical assistance, training programs, and reference materials) agencies and organizations serving multicultural populations;
- provide information on existing multicultural services and help establish multicultural services;
- promote awareness of multicultural mental health concerns and provide opportunities for multicultural populations to express their views on DMH policy development and program implementation; and
- request adequate funds for multicultural services from the director of the DMH.

MCL 330.100 et al.

DMH OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL SERVICES

House Bill 4559 (Substitute H-2) **RECEIVED**
First Analysis (10-26-89)

NOV 16 1989

Sponsor: Rep. Joseph Young, Sr.
Committee: Mental Health Mich. State Law Library

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

A representative from the Department of Mental Health testified that no new budget dollars would be needed for the current fiscal year, since the office already is being funded through current departmental appropriations. (10-25-89)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Ethnic minority communities often are under a great deal of stress and could benefit greatly from mental health services. Unfortunately, even when these services are available, they usually are not accessible to members of these ethnic minority communities because of language and cultural barriers. People who use the "mainstream" mental health system, moreover, have to have a certain level of skill and resources to take advantage of the available services, but often members of ethnic minority communities lack these skills and resources. Moreover, the needs of the Arab/Chaldean community are increasing because of the increasing number of new immigrants fleeing war in the Middle East. Although the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has recognized these barriers for some time now, and responded by establishing a number of ethnic minority mental health programs and an Office of Multicultural Services, there is nothing in state law mandating the department to take such action. The bill would give the Office of Multicultural Services statutory authority, thereby ensuring that such attention to the special needs of ethnic minority communities would not disappear should the director of the department change his mind or should a new director be appointed.

Against:

The Department of Mental Health is charged with responding to the needs of all citizens in the state. Singling out certain groups for preferential treatment not only is unfair to other groups, it takes away from the amount of money available for existing programs, which already are woefully underfunded.

Response: Ethnic minority communities consist of tax-paying citizens who deserve to have their special needs addressed. The kind of "ethnically sensitive" programs that the bill would ensure would continue, moreover, are cost-effective in the long run, as all preventive programs are. By helping people appropriately before they reach crisis and require long-term institutionalized care, the Office of Multicultural Services — and the kinds of programs it supports — can serve the state in ways that are both humane and cost effective.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Mental Health supports the bill. (10-25-89)

The Arab-American and Chaldean Communities Social Services Council supports the bill. (10-25-89)

H.B. 4559 (10-26-89)

OVER

Representatives from the following groups testified in support of the bill as introduced, but have not yet taken positions on the substitute:

The Michigan Hispanic Mental Health and Human Services Association

The Michigan Migrant Resources Council

Van Buren County Community Mental Health

Southwest Detroit Community Mental Health Services

The Intertribal Council of Michigan

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

The Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Michigan