



PRO BONO COUNSELING

Your Mental Health Connection

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Recognizing BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month



July is designated as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Mental Health Awareness Month to recognize the unique struggles historically

underrepresented groups face when seeking mental health care, treatment, and resources. Disparities in healthcare within BIPOC communities continue to exist due to barriers including systemic racism and discrimination, lack of language access services and cultural competency by mental health providers, and cultural stigma regarding seeking mental health treatment.

Pro Bono Counseling (PBC) strives to apply principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that we do. We are committed to providing access to mental health care services for underserved populations in Maryland and providing culturally and linguistically appropriate care to all those in need. PBC works to connect clients to therapists that are a good match, consider-

Personal Growth Counseling

People often reach out to Pro Bono Counseling (PBC) because they want to explore personal growth, by getting to know what may be keeping them from living the life they want to live. Mental health counseling can help identify symptoms you are experiencing and provide strategies and tools that can be implemented to improve your overall well-being.

For example, a man in his 40's reached out to PBC recently because he wanted assistance in managing his emotions and relationships. PBC matched him with a therapist based upon his preferences and later followed up to check on his progress. He shared that he had started using techniques his counselor recommended, like breathing strategies.

"I've been using it and it's been helping me," he stated. "I now walk away when I'm mad at something." He added that his therapist is "a cool counselor and he understands me. That's all I wanted was someone who would understand me."

A woman in her 60's recently contacted PBC to request therapy for her own personal development and to improve her self-care. After she had been connected to a PBC therapist for several weeks, she reported that her experience has been fantastic and her counselor is wonderful.

"I was looking for support and it's been great to be able to check in with her," she stated. "She's really great and asks very insightful questions which I really like. There's a lot that I've worked through. It's amazing what I've been learning."

ing preferences of cultural background, expertise, spoken languages, gender, therapy style, and other factors to find the right fit.

In addition to two bilingual staff members, more than 25% of PBC's licensed mental health professional volunteers are multilingual. Interpretation services are also available at no cost to the client. Of those clinicians who have shared their racial or ethnic identity with PBC, 45% share that they are BIPOC.

PBC is also committed to providing continuing education to Maryland's mental health providers to improve services for BIPOC clients. During this past year, we have held workshops on diverse topics like cultural competency, language access services, gender exploration, and cultural trauma.

New PBC Board President

Pro Bono Counseling's board members elected Eboni Barksdale-Smith, CRCCPA, as President at the June 2023 board meeting. Eboni succeeds Gil Bliss, LCSW-C, who served in the role from May 2021 until his recent retirement from the board.

"Since joining our board in 2020, Eboni has demonstrated her passion for Pro Bono Counseling's mission to ensure all Marylanders have access to mental health care," stated Pro Bono Counseling Executive Director Amy Greensfelder. "As president, we will all benefit from her vision and commitment to ensure the organization meets its strategic priorities and fundraising goals."

Eboni Barksdale-Smith is a New York native who now resides in Baltimore County, Maryland. From providing direct care services to adults with disabilities and at-risk youth to case manager for youth, adults with mental illness and refugees, to directing youth residential programming and most recently serving as a Community School Program Manager with Anne Arundel County Public Schools, her experiences have allowed her to serve, empower and support families and children. Eboni continues to put her passion for human service at the forefront of what she does with a focus on mental wellness and empowerment in every relationship she builds.

During the June 2023 meeting, additional board executive position changes included electing Alex Ebstein as First Vice President, Amory Cockrell, CPRM, as Second Vice President, and Shane Tanzymore as Secretary. Dan Morrison, CFP, was re-elected to a second term as Treasurer.



Eboni Barksdale-Smith

Mission

Pro Bono Counseling's mission is to remove barriers and provide relief by connecting Marylanders to mental health support.

Vision

Pro Bono Counseling envisions a future where everyone has access to quality mental health care.

New PBC Mission and Vision Statements

Pro Bono Counseling (PBC) has updated its mission and vision statements that will continue to guide the organization in its commitment to ensure all Marylanders have access to the mental health care and resources they need and deserve.

"As was true when PBC started over thirty years ago, too many Marylanders continue to fall through the cracks of an insufficient mental health care system and cannot afford the counseling they need," stated PBC Executive Director Amy Greensfelder. "These statements reflect the vital collective work of our team of volunteers, staff, board members, community partners, and organization supporters."

The new organization statements, shown in the graphic above, were developed and updated during a strategic planning process that included client and volunteer surveys and focus groups as well as interviews with staff members and constituents.

PBC's board members voted to adopt the updated statements at its June 2023 meeting and are effective immediately.

PBC Resource Corner: Share

In the United States, approximately one in four women suffers an infant loss, stillbirth, or miscarriage and finding support from family and friends can at times be difficult. **Share** is a community support program dedicated to helping anyone who experiences the tragic loss of a baby.

According to Share, having peer support beyond the families' social circle can help parents feel less isolated and understand that many of their emotions and experiences are common in grieving the death of their baby.



Share has chapters across the state of Maryland in Annapolis, Baltimore, Bel Air, Centreville, Largo, Rockville, and Salisbury who offer free weekly online support group meetings and additional resources, which are also available in Spanish.

For more info, visit the organization's [website](#) or click [here](#) for Spanish.