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Senator Osgood and Representative Rosenwald Champion Bill to Address Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Today, **Senator Rosalind Osgood (D-Broward County)** and **Representative Mitch Rosenwald (D-Broward County)** announced the introduction of legislation aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities in mental health and substance abuse services across Florida. The proposed bill strengthens the state's **Closing the Gap** grant program by expanding its priority areas to include initiatives targeting disparities in mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

“Communities of color have long faced systemic barriers to equitable mental health care and substance abuse services,” said **Senator Osgood**. “This bill is a crucial step in ensuring that we are addressing these disparities head-on by prioritizing funding for programs that support those most in need.”

The legislation amends **Section 381.7355, Florida Statutes**, to explicitly include **racial and ethnic disparities in mental health and substance use disorder morbidity and mortality rates** as a priority for funding under the **Closing the Gap** grant program. Additionally, it mandates that funding priority be given to proposals that focus on areas with the greatest documented disparities in access to these critical services.

“This bill's passage holds great promise to reducing racial inequities by increasing access to care,” said **Representative Rosenwald**. “Unfortunately, black and brown communities have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse than their white counterparts – an inequity rooted in systematic oppression. To help *Close the Gap*, this legislation would require Florida to add “behavioral health and substance abuse” as subjects for grants offered to direct service providers.”

The bill aligns with broader efforts to address health equity in Florida, building upon previous legislative measures that tackle disparities in maternal health, chronic disease, and social determinants of health. If passed, the law will take effect on **July 1, 2025**.

For more information about the bill or to express support, please contact the offices of Senator Osgood or Representative Rosenwald.

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