



February 24, 2020

Chair Maggie McIntosh
Appropriations Committee

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of HB1011

Dear Chair McIntosh and Committee Members,

CASA, the largest immigrant rights organization in Maryland, we submit this letter outlining our **SUPPORT** for HB 1011---Maryland Higher Education Outreach and College Access Pilot Program – Alterations (Maryland College Access Act)—which would repeal the date of termination and allocate funds for community based organizations to continue the work we have been doing to promote and increase access to college to traditionally underserved students.

In 2016, CASA was awarded funding for the MHEC College Access Pilot Program to expand the reach of our Escalera College Access program. Escalera is an evidenced based college readiness program created by UnidosUS, a national Latino focused organization, with more than 1000 affiliate organizations serving mostly Latino and immigrant communities, across the United States. Through the College Access Pilot Program funding we were able to expand our program across to four different sites in Baltimore City, Baltimore and Prince George’s counties. Most program participants fit one of two profile types: newcomer students or first-generation immigrant students. Each student profile type has unique needs, but both are underserved and face enormous challenges to success. Newcomer students are at very high risk for dropping out, after arriving in the U.S. at a later age with limited (or no) English language skills, interrupted schooling, often unstable family relationships and families separated by borders, recent trauma from their home countries and their journey (most students are fleeing horrific violence and poverty in their home countries, and many students, especially girls, are victims of sexual assault during their journey). First-generation students face different challenges – as the most bilingual members of their households, they frequently play adult roles in their families, growing up faster than their U.S. born counterparts. Because they are serving in a “parent” role to their families in navigating health care systems, landlords, and frequently employers, they often do not have the support they need to navigate the college application process. They face enormous pressure from parents who have given up everything to help them achieve the “American dream,” and frequently suffer depression and anxiety when they are not able to live up to the outsized expectations they believe their parents have for them. Both groups of students are continually navigating two worlds – the immigrant world of their parents and families, and the U.S. world of their school and community.

The College Access Pilot Program allowed us to reach students such as the ones described above in culturally appropriate ways that were designed to best serve them while promoting a college going culture. From 2016-2019, the CASA Escalera program reached:

- 225 students in afterschool programming; of those students, 106 were juniors and seniors
- 225 students in afterschool programming received wraparound services that included legal referrals, assistance signing up for medical coverage, food assistance and more
- 1316 students through one time workshops on college readiness, how to complete college and financial aid applications and financial literacy on how to save for college
- 400 school teachers, counselors and other support staff received training on how to promote college and college readiness to first generation and immigrant students
- 71 Baltimore City youth were able to complete the Mayor's Scholars program and all enrolled in Baltimore City Community College for fall classes
- 100% of our graduating seniors graduated with a college and career plan
- 75% of our graduating seniors enrolled in college upon graduation

This data demonstrates the impact we had implementing this program and even more impactful have been the individual stories of program participants such as Crisaly, who was a senior in 2017 at National Academy Foundation. In the year we served Crisaly, she and her father were undergoing the process to become US citizens, because of our wraparound service approach we were able to complete the necessary modifications and supplemental applications, including a fee waiver which saved them \$600 in fees, and both Crisaly and her father were sworn in as new citizens in June 2017 – just days after she became the first in her family to graduate from high school. Crisaly became an AmeriCorps member at CASA to dedicate a year of service to helping other immigrants navigate the citizenship process, while going to community college to pursue her career in finance. She also received enough grant money to cover her tuition for the first year.

It is stories like Crisaly's that leads us to SUPPORT reinstatement of the MHEC College Access Pilot Program this year. This program has allowed community organizations across the state to serve students who otherwise may not get a chance to envision a future that involves achieving higher education. We urge a favorable response to HB1011.

Thank you,

Maritza Solano
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CASA