



February 14, 2020

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of HB 515
Del. Anne Kaiser, Chair
House Ways & Means Committee

Chair Kaiser and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

On behalf of the CASA, I, Maritza Solano, Director of Education, am pleased to offer favorable testimony regarding House Bill 515, which would require each county board of education to submit to the State Board of Education the ratio of students to certain staff members in each school specifically those staff providing critical behavioral and socio-emotional services to students. As the Director of Education at CASA, the largest membership based immigrant advocacy and services organization in the region with approximately 100,000 members across the state, I know the deep need for these critical school staff members who cannot always serve students adequately because of the large caseloads they carry. CASA provides a variety of services that range from public health outreach and education awareness campaigns, system navigation, and advocating with families and students to improve their educational experiences and ensure academic achievement. Our interaction with thousands of community members through these programs gives our organization a unique framework of understanding how critical it is that immigrant families and all individuals have access well supported, resource filled schools.

We strongly believe that having an accurate picture of the ratios of students to these critical staff members (school counselors, school psychologists, bilingual facilitators, social workers) will allow the State, local counties and decision makers to determine how to create programs and funding to better staff these critical positions throughout our schools. At CASA, we are working with students and families facing traumatic experiences due to migration and separation and trying to navigate a new school system without support from social workers, bilingual facilitators or parent engagement specialists who provide these critical services. Additionally, we serve nearly 1000 students a year through a series of standalone workshops on how to get to college and pay for it that do not know

their school counselor because of the large number of students in the caseload of each counselor. An accurate report on the ratios of students to these critical staff members would provide a pathway towards solutions to these shortages seen in the schools of some of the most vulnerable students in our state.

Every summer CASA hosts our Teacher Parent Connections Engagement Institute, a week-long professional development experience for educators and school staff members from Montgomery and Prince George's Counties; in the last 5 summers, 65 educators and school staff have graduated from our program. And during every single experience, we have heard of educators having to fill in for these critical roles when engaging with students and families and not being equipped with the unique skills of a social worker, school psychologist and counselors. Ultimately, sometimes having to fill these needs detracts from their key responsibilities and duties. Educators want to be holistically supportive of the students and families they serve but should not be obliged to do work of other staff members because of shortages in personnel.

Thank you for your consideration on this bill. **CASA strongly supports HB515 and urges a favorable report from the committee.** Please contact our office with any questions or requests for further commentary. CASA appreciates the willingness of our decision makers to place some guardrails and gather the information necessary to ensure that the behavioral and socio-emotional needs of students are being met in their schools and communities. We know that when we holistically care for children and families they are stronger and better prepared to navigate their communities and become successful, contributing citizens of our communities.

Thank you,

Maritza Solano
Director of Education



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