



**Testimony in SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT for HB612**

Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act  
Ways and Means Committee & Economic Matters Committee  
Pablo Blank, On Behalf of CASA

January 27, 2021

Dear Honorable Chair Kaiser and Members of the Committee,

CASA<sup>1</sup> offers a favorable with amendment testimony in support of House Bill 612, the RELIEF Act. While this bill represents a meaningful investment to help Marylanders cope with the consequences of the COVID pandemic, it fails to support some of our most vulnerable and marginalized communities, including undocumented immigrants and their families. CASA is in support of HB612, pending an amendment to expand the coronavirus relief payment to all Marylanders who meet the Maryland earned income tax credit income criteria.

CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland, and in the Mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 100,000 Black and Brown immigrants and working families. Our offices provide a variety of services including free tax preparation services (through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program), ESOL classes, citizenship preparation, financial education, health navigation and education, legal advice on immigration, housing, and employment issues, workforce development, small-business support, and day labor opportunities. Since the pandemic began, our offices expanded our services to support Marylanders with emergency food delivery, pandemic resource support, and also launched a Solidarity fund to get direct cash assistance to our membership, as many of them are excluded from many forms of government relief.

The economic impact of the pandemic on Maryland families, especially Black and Brown immigrant families, has been devastating. Although many immigrant families have been working on the frontlines as essential workers during the pandemic, thousands of immigrant Marylanders have lost their income sources, whether through an employer or self-employment. The health impact has also been extraordinarily devastating, leading to many members of our community confronting new medical expenses when they got infected by the COVID virus.

Maryland's undocumented population of approximately 275,000 people<sup>2</sup> had suffered disproportionately during the pandemic and been left out of critical forms of relief that many others have relied on to stay afloat over the last year. Despite paying taxes in the state, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for unemployment and ineligible for health care through

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<sup>1</sup> CASA is a grassroots organization working to organize, advocate for, and expand opportunities for Latino and immigrant people in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We aim to create a more just society by building power and improving the quality of life in working class and immigrant communities. [www.wearecasa.org](http://www.wearecasa.org)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maryland>

the Maryland Health Connection. Furthermore, they were excluded completely from the first round of stimulus payments distributed through the federal CARES Act - and still drastically limited in the second round of relief.

The pandemic has been especially difficult for Maryland taxpayers doing business in economic sectors such as construction, food and restaurants, child care, house cleaning, and entertainment. Those sectors are typically where taxpayers with ITINs file their Form 502, Maryland resident income tax return work the most. Considering the exclusion from multiple forms of state and federal relief, Maryland legislators have a responsibility to ensure that all Marylanders are eligible to receive the coronavirus relief payment.

An amendment to address this important issue would prevent Maryland from discriminating against taxpayers based on the type of tax identification (whether it be Social Security Number or Individual Tax Identification Number) they use to present themselves to the tax authority at the time of submitting the Maryland income tax return. There is no question that the bill represents a meaningful investment to help Marylanders cope with the consequences of the pandemic. The coronavirus does not discriminate by Tax ID type, so this relief should not discriminate either.

**For all of those reasons, CASA urges a favorable report, with an amendment to expand relief payments to all Marylanders, on House Bill 612.** Thank you for your time and consideration, and if you have any questions please feel free to contact Cathryn Paul at [cpaul@wearecasa.org](mailto:cpaul@wearecasa.org).

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