



Testimony Supporting SB161  
Budget and Taxation Committee:

January 23, 2024

Position: SUPPORT  
Community Schools – Alterations

My name is Carlos Orbe, Jr., and I am the Communications and Public Affairs Specialist for Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU). MLU is a statewide network dedicated to supporting and empowering Latino and immigrant communities across Maryland. MLU comprises a diverse group of organizations, businesses, and individuals who share a common goal: to address disparities and inequities faced by Latino and immigrant communities and to find collaborative solutions that promote inclusivity and access to essential services.

I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 161, also known as the "Community Schools – Alterations" bill. This legislation represents a significant step towards enhancing educational opportunities and overall well-being for students and families in Maryland, particularly in underserved communities.

The core principles of this bill align perfectly with the mission and values of MLU:

**Equity and Access:** Senate Bill 161 aims to allocate resources and support to areas with the greatest needs. By prioritizing funding for community schools in high-need areas, the legislation takes a crucial step toward addressing educational disparities and ensuring equitable access to essential services.

**Community Engagement:** The bill places a strong emphasis on involving parents and the local community in decision-making processes. This collaborative approach not only empowers community members but also ensures that the services offered are culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of the Latino and immigrant communities.

**Wraparound Services:** We are particularly pleased to see the focus on providing wraparound services in community schools. These services, including healthcare, counseling, and academic support, are essential for addressing the holistic needs of students and fostering a conducive learning environment.

Capacity Building: MLU is committed to capacity-building within grassroots Hispanic-serving organizations. The bill's support for community school coordinators and the creation of a common needs assessment tool aligns with our mission to strengthen the ability of local organizations to serve their communities effectively.

Partnerships and Policy: We appreciate the encouragement for local governments to form partnerships and adopt policies that support community schools. These collaborations can further enhance the impact of community schools in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Latino and immigrant students and families.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 161 reflects a proactive and comprehensive approach to improving the educational outcomes and overall well-being of students and families in Maryland. MLU firmly believes that this legislation will contribute significantly to narrowing educational gaps and fostering inclusive and vibrant communities in our state.

We urge you to support and pass Senate Bill 161, recognizing the positive impact it will have on the lives of Latino and immigrant communities in Maryland. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.  
Communications and Public Affairs Specialist  
Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU)