

February 23, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
3 West
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support for Senate Bill 518 Maryland Financial Empowerment Center Network Pilot Program Establishment

Dear Chair Guzzone,

Maryland Latinos Unidos respectfully supports Senate Bill 518, which establishes the Maryland Financial Empowerment Center Network Pilot Program to provide free, professional, one on one financial counseling services to Maryland residents.

Financial instability is a structural barrier facing many Latino and immigrant families across Maryland. Latino households nationally have significantly lower median wealth compared to White households, and are more likely to experience income volatility, limited access to traditional banking services, and higher exposure to predatory financial products. Research from the Urban Institute and the Federal Reserve consistently shows that households of color are less likely to have emergency savings sufficient to cover even three months of expenses.

In Maryland, Latino workers are overrepresented in service, hospitality, construction, and other sectors where wages can fluctuate and benefits such as retirement savings and employer sponsored health insurance are less common. Many immigrant households are also first generation wealth builders navigating complex tax systems, credit markets, and small business development pathways without institutional support.

Financial Empowerment Centers have demonstrated measurable success in other jurisdictions. Evaluations from the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund show that clients receiving structured financial counseling reduce debt, increase savings, improve credit scores, and stabilize housing. These outcomes are not abstract. They translate into fewer evictions, greater small business growth, and stronger long term family stability.

Implications for Latino and immigrant communities

Senate Bill 518 advances economic mobility by building trusted, culturally competent infrastructure that helps families move from financial precarity toward long term security. For Latino communities, access to free financial counseling means:

- Increased access to safe banking products
- Improved credit and homeownership pathways

- Reduced vulnerability to predatory lending
- Greater small business sustainability

Maryland Latinos Unidos can amplify this initiative by partnering with Financial Empowerment Centers to ensure outreach materials are available in Spanish and other languages, and by connecting immigrant families to counseling services through trusted community networks.

For these reasons, Maryland Latinos Unidos respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 518.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.
Communications and Public Affairs Specialist
Maryland Latinos Unidos
corbejr@mdlatinosunidos.org