

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary

Chair, Ways and Means Committee

Lowe House Office Building, Room 131

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 0115, Election Law, Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities, Automatic Restoration of Voter Registration

Dear Chair Atterbeary,

Maryland Latinos Unidos respectfully submits strong support for House Bill 0115, Election Law, Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities, Automatic Restoration of Voter Registration. HB 0115 is before the House Ways and Means Committee during the 2026 Legislative Session and addresses a critical barrier to civic participation for Marylanders returning home after incarceration.

HB 0115 requires the automatic restoration of voter registration for individuals released from a State correctional facility who are otherwise eligible to vote. Under current law, many returning citizens face administrative and informational obstacles that delay or prevent re registration, even though their right to vote has been restored. This bill ensures that restoration is not merely theoretical, but operational and accessible.

The need for this reform is particularly acute for Latino and immigrant communities. Latino Marylanders are disproportionately represented in low income neighborhoods that experience higher rates of policing, charging, and incarceration. National research shows that people of color are significantly more likely to be justice involved than their White counterparts, even when controlling for similar conduct. In Maryland, communities with higher concentrations of Latino residents also report lower voter participation rates, driven in part by structural barriers and civic disengagement following justice system involvement.

Automatic voter registration upon release promotes reintegration, civic belonging, and democratic participation. Studies consistently show that individuals who are civically engaged after release are less likely to re offend and more likely to secure employment and stable housing. Restoring voter registration immediately after release affirms dignity, strengthens community ties, and reduces long term disenfranchisement that often extends to entire families.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders are substantial. Many mixed status and immigrant families include U S citizen members whose civic participation is shaped by household experience with the justice system. By normalizing and simplifying voter restoration,

HB 0115 helps rebuild trust in democratic institutions and signals that civic participation is a right, not a privilege conditioned on navigating complex bureaucracy. MLU can amplify these outcomes through community education, voter engagement, and reintegration support programming that ensures returning citizens understand and exercise their rights.

For these reasons, Maryland Latinos Unidos urges a favorable report on HB 0115. This legislation advances equity, strengthens democracy, and ensures that Maryland's commitment to inclusive civic participation extends to all eligible residents.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

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