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January 27, 2026

BILL: SB 252 / HB 330 – Maryland Legal Services Corporation - Board of Directors - Membership

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings (Senate) / Judiciary (House)

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments (FWA)

RE: Strengthening MLSC Governance through Community Lived Experience

Dear Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Honorable Members of the Judicial Committee,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC., a consultancy grounded in data-driven transformation that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am the mother of two children with disabilities, a former practicing nursing practitioner, special education parent advocate, and public health servant. I am writing to offer a **Favorable with Amendments report on SB 252/HB 330.**

While I support the expansion of the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) Board to 12 members to meet the growing needs of civil legal aid oversight, the current appointment process remains a closed loop of political selection that risks silencing the very voices the Corporation is designed to serve.

To ensure the Board reflects the skill, knowledge, and direct experience of the community, I respectfully request the following amendments:

1. Mandate Lived Experience in Civil Legal Aid

The bill currently distinguishes only between "lawyers" and "nonlawyers". This is insufficient to ensure client-centered governance.

- Amendment: Require that at least two of the five nonlawyer seats be filled by individuals with lived experience as former clients of civil legal aid or as community advocates with documented expertise in navigating civil legal systems.

2. Establish a Self-Nomination and Community Review Process

Currently, the appointment power rests solely with the Governor, often resulting in appointments of political favorites or legal vendors rather than grassroots leaders.

- Amendment: Create a formal self-nomination pathway that allows community members to apply directly for Board consideration.



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- Amendment: Establish a community advisory screening committee to review these applications, ensuring that candidates are selected based on their demonstrated skill and knowledge of community needs rather than political proximity.

3. Decrease "Gatekeeping" in Appointments

By opening the process to self-nomination, the State can decrease the systemic "gatekeeping" that prevents qualified, marginalized voices from participating in high-level policy decisions. This ensures the Board is not just a collection of "legal experts," but a body that understands the real-world barriers families face when seeking justice.

Conclusion

The expansion of the MLSC Board is a necessary step, but size alone does not guarantee equity. We must move beyond a model where community members are spoken *for* and instead create a structure where they speak *for themselves*.

I urge a **Favorable with Amendments report on SB 252 and HB 330.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Alita-Geri Carter, MSN, DNP-C, CPNP-PC, BCPA
Resident, Howard County, MD