



## **Testimony in Support of HB 818**

**March 2, 2020**

### **Maryland House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee**

#### **HB – 818 Redistricting and Apportionment - Population Count - Citizenship Status**

**George Escobar**

**CASA, Chief of Programs and Services**

Honorable Members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee:


My name is George Escobar, I am Chief of Programs and Services at CASA, the mid-Atlantic region's largest immigrant serving organization with over 100,000 members. On behalf of my organization and our members, I urge you to vote in favor of enactment of House Bill 818, which would ensure a fair and democratic process takes hold in the apportionment of electoral districts following an accurate count of our population resulting from the 2020 Census. We believe this measure is necessary given the level of unprecedented attacks against immigrant communities perpetuated by the Trump administration as well as recent threats announced by the government that only a count of citizens should factor in the redistricting process. Our legislature must act now to ensure that the objectives of the decennial census remain relevant and the US constitution be upheld.

For the past 2 years, CASA has fought the Trump administration's attempts to undermine the objectives of the constitutionally mandated Census. Upon learning of the addition of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, CASA launched a national lawsuit demanding the question be withdrawn. After joining forces with partner organizations in New York, CASA successfully won injunctions against the question in both district and federal appeals courts, and then following an appeal by the government to the US Supreme Court, CASA's case was consolidated with several others from around the country as the Supreme Court reviewed the arguments. In the Courtroom on that hearing day to witness the arguments in person were three CASA members, all of whom were non-citizens of varying statuses who were the face of CASA's legal case. During the various stages of our case, all three individuals placed themselves at risk as they were deposed in government facilities, by government lawyers intent on challenging our and their standing in the case. All three faced severe consequences for their participation in the litigation, risked being deported and separated from their families, but all three forged ahead regardless of the risk because they believed their voice mattered. They believed they have a right

to be counted in the census, they believed that although the government at this time does not allow them to vote, they have a right to civic participation in their communities, to engage elected representatives in their communities and work with them to create a better community for all residents, something that could only happen if that representative understands they have an obligation to represent, advocate and better the lives of all in his/her district and not select who they will work for depending on their status.

This belief is what continues to drive CASA in its efforts to ensure we do all in our power to ensure all are counted in the upcoming census. CASA is currently in the middle of a massive census education, engagement and assistance campaign and I am personally honored to serve alongside this bill's author on the Maryland Census Complete Count Committee working very closely with our state's department of planning staff as they work each and every day to ensure an accurate count. However, despite all these efforts we know the Trump administration continues to do all it can to undermine the purpose of census and use it as a weapon to suppress the political power of immigrant communities as well as limit the resources they are entitled to receive under an accurate count. By targeting immigrant communities in such a way, the state of Maryland will likewise be denied both the resources and electoral influence it would merit from an accurate census count. We must act now to limit the damage Maryland will incur should the Trump administration continues to weaponize the census. Please vote YES on HB818 to ensure accurate representation for all.

Thank you for your time



George Escobar

Chief of Programs and Services