



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Anne R. Kaiser, Chair
Delegate Alonzo T. Washington, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

RE: HB1255 Education – Bilingual Learner Prekindergarten Grant Program

The MLLC supports HB1255 Education – Bilingual Learner Prekindergarten Grant Program.

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation which improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a voice in the development of public policy affecting the Latino community and the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB1255.

According to a 2018 Migration Policy Institute report on English Learners in Maryland, about 15% of the state population are individuals born outside of the United States and about 27% of school-age children have one or more foreign-born parents. A large portion of these students come from Latin American Spanish-speaking households. As the rates of immigrant populations continue to rise in Maryland, it is crucial for all children to have the proper resources to learn and excel in school.

The importance of early education is well-documented; adding the factor of bilingualism only further benefits children. A bilingual education for our young English learners will not only help develop English language proficiency, but also cognitive and social-emotional development. The U.S. Department of Education has noted that early bilingual experiences sharpen young minds and allows children to maintain strong family and cultural bonds. All our Maryland children should have the opportunity to receive a great education, especially if that means partially in their native language.

HB1255 establishes a Bilingual Learner Prekindergarten Grant Program that will assist county public schools in creating early bilingual education. These pilot programs will support prekindergarten English language learners and their families to ensure young students are well-equipped for primary school. A language barrier can be a difficult obstacle for so many families trying to navigate our education system, however, the legislature has the chance to make an impactful difference for these parents and young scholars.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges a favorable report on HB1255.