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January 27, 2021

TO: The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
Chair, Appropriations Committee

FROM: The Office of the Attorney General

RE: HB 15 – Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs — **Letter of Support**

House Bill 15 establishes the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to create a network of neighborhood-based centers providing immigrant services, assisting immigrants with the naturalization process or applying for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), assist law enforcement in combating crimes against immigrants, and promote civic and economic participation among immigrant communities.

Maryland is a vibrant and diverse state. Approximately 15 percent (911,582) of our population is foreign-born and just over 7 percent (443,489) are noncitizens. Between 2010 and 2014, nearly 300,000 people in Maryland lived with at least one undocumented family member; and 7 percent of U.S. citizen children in Maryland live with at least one undocumented family member.¹ For years, these Marylanders have lived under the constant threat of detention and deportation – an often cruel and inhumane system that rips families apart and captures immigrants with and without lawful status.² House Bill 15 counteracts some of the federal hostility towards immigrants that we have witnessed over the past four years by ensconcing in the State executive branch a Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to help these Marylanders navigate our systems. Even with anticipated improvements to federal immigration policies, House Bill 15 is still laudable.

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maryland>.

² While immigration raids increased significantly under the Trump Administration, prior federal administrations also arrested and deported Maryland residents and some immigration enforcement is expected to continue under the Biden Administration.

Section 9-3304 of the bill requires the Director of Immigrant Affairs to file annual reports to the Governor and General Assembly describing the activities of the Office to include: (1) summaries of calls and queries received through the hotline and website; (2) information on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); (3) the estimated number of immigrants assisted; (4) the status of workforce development programs; and (5) any other relevant information.

The Office of the Attorney General supports policies, like those proposed in HB 15, that promote the provision of services to immigrants residing in Maryland. Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 15.

cc: Members of the Appropriations Committee