



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB15: Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs**  
Appropriations Committee  
Pablo Blank, on Behalf of CASA

January 27, 2021

Dear Honorable Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and Members of the Committee,

CASA<sup>1</sup> is pleased to provide favorable testimony in support of House Bill 15, Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, a meaningful investment in immigrant communities across Maryland. CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland with a membership of over 100,000 black and brown immigrant and working families. Our offices provide a variety of services including ESOL classes, citizenship preparation, free tax preparation, financial education, health navigation and education, legal advice on immigration, housing, and employment issues, workforce development, and day labor opportunities.

An office, such as one proposed in this legislation, will have a tremendous positive impact on immigrant families in Maryland who still lack basic language access, experience exploitation in a variety of different spaces, maintain distrust of the government and more. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on immigrant families over the last year illustrates how critical the establishment of a Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs is, now more than ever before.

As service providers with only a specific set of services available, we are constantly in communication with countless immigrants in need of a variety of different resources that we don't provide. The number of immigrant families in Maryland is growing, with approximately 915,000 Marylanders born abroad, making around 15% of the total population of our state<sup>2</sup> The Governor's Office of Immigrants Affairs would play a significant role in educating the immigrant population about available services, creating coalitions of organizations dedicated to immigrants, increasing access to ESOL programs, assisting immigrants with immigration related matters, developing and leveraging immigrants skills to benefit the community, strengthening the relationship with immigrants and communities they live in, reducing exploitation, and so much more.

We are confident that the Office of Government Affairs will help to advance the priorities of our membership of immigrants from over 60 countries of origin, mainly from Latin American, Caribbean and African countries - but also the greater immigrant community. If the office is created, the Governor will have the opportunity and the tools to better and more strongly support those Maryland residents born abroad who call Maryland their home.

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<sup>1</sup> CASA is a grassroots organization working to organize, advocate for, and expand opportunities for Latino and immigrant people in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We aim to create a more just society by building power and improving the quality of life in working class and immigrant communities. [www.wearecasa.org](http://www.wearecasa.org)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maryland>

Maryland has already taken some positive steps to include immigrants into its social and economic fabric, such as the non-compliance driver's license and the passage of the Maryland DREAM Act. The new Office of Immigrants Affairs will become a strong tool for the Governor to better direct its government to resolve further integration issues, helping immigrants become a fully integrated member of our society.

**For all of those reasons, CASA urges a favorable report on House Bill 15.** Thank you for your time and consideration, and if you have any questions please feel free to contact Cathryn Paul at [cpaul@wearecasa.org](mailto:cpaul@wearecasa.org).

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