

House Bill 15
Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Appropriations Committee
January 27, 2021

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 15, which would establish the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we stand in solidarity with the immigrant community in Maryland. Through our work at the Esperanza Center, located in the Baltimore neighborhood of Fells Point, we offer our new neighbors ESOL classes, healthcare, legal services, family reunification services and general information.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties, those challenges and difficulties have only escalated during the Pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, especially when it comes to the immigrant community. The immigrant community has a disproportionate share of essential workers and a disproportionate share of positive cases. At the same time, the community was denied stimulus payments, often lacked access to healthcare and faced the digital divide.

In Baltimore City, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) not only played a key role in convening and advocating for services to the immigrant community during the Pandemic, but they have a history of standing with the immigrant community in Baltimore. Established in 2014, MIMA has been a dedicated partner of immigrant-supporting organizations and groups in Baltimore, advocating for immigrants across city agencies to make sure that programs and policies are accessible, equitable and supportive of the immigrant community. MIMA also highlights the contributions the immigrant population has made to Baltimore.

This bill envisions replicating MIMA at the state level with a cabinet-level office that would work with immigrant communities and state agencies. The office would be tasked with establishing a network of providers, increasing access to ESOL classes, assisting with immigration legal matters, leveraging immigrants' skills and strengthening the relationship between immigrants and the broader community. These are much needed services that would benefit immigrants across the State.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 15.

Submitted By: Matthew Dolamore, Program Director, Esperanza Center