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TO: The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
Chair, Appropriations Committee

FROM: The Office of the Attorney General

RE: HB 514 – Maryland Legal Services Corporation Funding – Abandoned Property –
– **Letter of Support**

The Office of the Attorney General supports House Bill 514, legislation that increases from \$2,000,000 to \$8,000,000 the amount the State Comptroller is required to distribute from abandoned property funds annually to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) Fund. MLSC provides grants to Maryland nonprofits that, in turn, provide civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. MLSC is traditionally funded through Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account (IOLTA) and court filing fees. However, both funding streams proved insignificant during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic when courts limited filings and bank interest is negligible.

For a nation with the world's second-highest per capita number of lawyers, we fail to provide legal assistance to the low-income population, who needs the legal services the most.¹ According to the World Justice Project, the United States ranks 108th out of 128 countries in the accessibility and affordability of civil justice.² House Bill 514 is a response to improve this justice gap and to provide an opportunity for low-income Marylanders to have a voice. Thus, to provide a fair opportunity for low-income Marylanders to be represented, legal assistance funding must be increased.

¹ See Deborah L. Rhode et al., *Access to Justice through Limited Legal Assistance*, 16 NW. U. J. INT'L HUM. RTS. 1, 2 (2018).

² U.S. Rank on Access to Civil Justice in Rule of Law Index Drops To 108th Out Of 128 Countries, NATIONAL COALITION FOR A CIVIL RIGHT TO COUNSEL (Mar. 10, 2020), http://civilrighttocounsel.org/major_developments/217.

House Bill 514 is consistent with a recommendation of the Attorney General’s Access to Justice Task Force urging the General Assembly to “[m]andate a new appropriation from the State’s General Fund to support [MLSC]-funded civil legal aid services as well as civil legal aid and legal support provided by organizations not funded by MLSC.”³

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General urges a favorable report of HB 514.

cc: Members of the Appropriations Committee

³ See MD. ATT’Y GEN. BRIAN E. FROSH’S COVID-19 ACCESS TO JUST. TASK FORCE, CONFRONTING THE COVID-19 ACCESS TO JUSTICE CRISIS 14 (Jan. 2021), https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/A2JC%20Documents1/AG_Covid_A2J_TF_Report.pdf.