

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB317

Political Latinx United for Movement and Action in Society (PLUMAS)

Good afternoon Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the committee,

My name is Michael Mareno, and I will be testifying on behalf of the Political Latinxs United for Movement and Action in Society, commonly referred to as PLUMAS. We are a student organization at the University of Maryland, College Park that works to promote civic engagement and activism, as well as provide a space for students to share their thoughts on the issues facing the Latinx community. PLUMAS will be testifying today in **favor of Senate Bill 317**, also known as **Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator**.

As a student organization, we hold frequent events throughout the academic year, including regular general body meetings, town halls, and political education seminars. Our annual Dream Gala, held each spring, is one of our largest events that we put on. Although this year's gala will look a bit different due to COVID-19, its intention remains the same: celebrating immigrant communities, and working to raise money for our Dream Fund, which helps support undocumented students at our campus with emergency legal expenses, such as status renewals.

The extraordinary costs and fees associated with acquiring legal defense will more often than not place those services out of reach for an individual that may be facing deportation. As a result, those individuals may be forced to represent themselves in immigration proceedings, putting them at an abject disadvantage. CASA, a Latinx advocacy organization that we at PLUMAS frequently work alongside, has estimated that nearly 530 adults represent themselves *pro se* each year in the state of Maryland alone.

Organizations like CASA and PLUMAS can crowdfund with events like the Dream GALA to protect vulnerable members of our community. But as a state, Maryland can affirm the right to due process by passing Senate Bill 317, which would create a universal representation program and guarantee qualified legal defense to people in immigration detention. This bill would go a long way towards addressing the challenges that immigrant communities have faced, especially after the past four years of inflammatory rhetoric and aggressive policies coming from the head of our nation's government.

By working with the communities this bill would impact most as a part of PLUMAS, I know without a doubt that the need for universal representation cannot be overstated. I am urging the committee to give this bill a favorable report and help pass House Bill 317.

Sincerely,
Michael Mareno
Social Chair