



**Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 255**  
State Personnel and Pensions – Office of the Public Defender –  
Collective Bargaining and Placement  
Finance Committee

February 8, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice-Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committee:

CASA respectfully urges the committee to provide a favorable recommendation SB255. CASA is the largest membership-based immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland with a membership of over 122,000 Black and Latino immigrants and working families.

This legislation enables collective bargaining for the hard-working employees in the Office of the Public Defender and converts the attorneys from “at-will” special appointees into the state merit system. As an organization dedicated to advancing the civil rights of Black and brown immigrants in Maryland and standing up for everyone’s due process rights during criminal proceedings, we believe the employees who provide those same services must have due process rights themselves.

Public Defenders in Maryland do incredibly critical work for our communities, and they often do so short-staffed and under-resourced. They deserve to have a seat at a table when it comes to negotiating their pay and working conditions, just like 30,000 other Maryland state employees have. We believe every worker deserves the right to collectively bargain, and OPD employees should be no exception.

Collective bargaining and merit protections also helps promote a workforce that is career-oriented and can help with retaining dedicated staff to better serve those in need of public defense. Too often, those who cannot afford legal representation are the same individuals who have the system stacked against them. Every Marylander deserves excellent representation during what can be the worst time of someone’s life. We are confident that Collective Bargaining for OPD employees will help provide even better legal services to those who depend on them.

CASA strongly supports SB255 and urges a favorable report from the committee.

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