

PLUMAS Testimony

HB 114

Good afternoon members of the committee. My name is Amy Rivera, and I will be testifying on behalf of the Political Latinxs United for Movement and Action in Society (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 House Bill 114**, also known as the **Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program**.



The right to counsel is essential to the fight for justice. Studies have shown that immigrants who are given representation in deportation proceedings not only have an exponentially better chance of staying in the country but are also more likely to take the steps necessary to obtain legal status. 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. This is a gross miscarriage of justice that impacts everyone, not only individual immigrants.

Organizations like CASA and PLUMAS can crowdfund to protect vulnerable members of our community, but as a state, Maryland can affirm the right to due process by passing House Bill 114, which would create a universal representation program and guarantee qualified legal defense to people in immigration detention. It is not an impossible feat. States like New York, which have a massive immigrant population, have already undergone this process and have been very successful. Within MD, the universal representation programs in **Prince George's County and Baltimore City** have also proven that MD has the capability and potential to create an effective and exemplary representation program. This bill would go a long way towards addressing the challenges that immigrant communities have faced while also ensuring the future of all Marylanders, regardless of origin.

I am urging the committee to give this bill a **favorable** report and help pass **House Bill 114**.

Sincerely,

Amy Rivera, President