



TESTIMONY

HB0056 - Maryland Dual Language Education - Teacher Certification, Program Implementation, and Study

January 20, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

My name is Carlos Orbe. I am the Public Affairs Specialist for Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), an association housed at MD Nonprofits of over 300 Latino community leaders, business owners, and Latino-led nonprofits. MLU's mission is to unify efforts across the state to advocate and organize for the benefit of Maryland's Latino community. Our vision is that the Latino community in Maryland thrives, achieves excellence, innovates, and continually makes progress economically, socially, and environmentally. We utilize data-driven and evidence-based approaches to build coalitions to advocate and create a space for every Latino to have a voice. In doing so, we look to create or advocate for a network of resources to support Latino-initiatives that positively impact the community overall. For these reasons, MLU supports HB0056, "*Maryland Dual Language Education - Teacher Certification, Program Implementation, and Study*", and wholeheartedly believes the community at large, and the state of Maryland will greatly benefit from dual language education, program implementation, and teacher certification.

Established in 2020, MLU has become one of the most involved non-profit organizations within Maryland's Latino community. From its inception and as a civil right, MLU's members embraced bilingual education and universal language access across the state as a principle. In its short history, MLU has witnessed a litany of familial circumstances that were crippled from lack of language access. Children as young as five are often forced to act as translators for their parents, guardians, or family members. Oftentimes, these children are forced to translate professional contracts, hospital bills, doctor's orders, and other types of important legal documents because the adults lack access to English as Second Language (ESL) courses. The lack of dual language access in the state of Maryland, from trained professionals to inaccessible internet webpages, demands a solution for what could be referred to as ever-growing systemic oppression not only for Spanish-dominant Latino families, but for other ELL communities as well. The U.S. Education Department reported a shortage of ESL teachers in all grade levels (pre-K-12) in Maryland as of the 2021-2022 school year.

There is ample evidence indicating that dual language programs lead to superior academic achievement, promote multilingualism, encourage multicultural understanding, and bring the multiple benefits of integration across linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic levels – an imperative given the political, economic, and social climate in recent years. Dual language education offers benefits for both emergent bilinguals who are English Language Learners (ELLs) and English-speaking students who wish to acquire a second language.

Well-implemented dual language programs require intensive, specialized training and benefit from Teacher Certification. Research indicates ELL students perform best when their teachers possess not only the knowledge and skills necessary for their grade level/content area, but also the understanding of second language acquisition, bilingual child development, and strong proficiency in the languages they teach. Given the proliferation of dual language programs, the need for well-prepared dual language education educators is imperative. Schools across the state are facing a shortage of qualified bilingual educators, which could compromise the quality of language program implementation.

With the passage of HB0056, this committee has an opportunity to be a part of the best solution possible for these children, teachers, and families. Maryland could follow models from other states that have successfully developed state-of-the-art alternative certification programs, graduate certificates, and teacher residency programs to grow the supply of bilingual educators. Maryland has the opportunity to become an educational leader in the expansion of bilingual teacher education programs by establishing:

1. A certification program for dual language teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools.
2. Guidelines for ongoing professional development for dual language teachers.
3. Guidelines for the implementation of dual language programs in public schools.

Progress comes in many forms. In years past, Maryland's Latino community has witnessed the passage of legislation benefitting specific communities in previous General Assembly sessions. Today, our hope is that we can see a bill and call it our own. We would like to see progress for our immigrant and ELL communities, and this starts with our children. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.