



**Testimony on SB0429**  
Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act

Senate Budget and Taxation

February 19, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

CASA provides testimony on Senate Bill 429- Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act to highlight the needs for continued analysis on how to best serve Maryland students. CASA is a national powerhouse organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class: Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 173,000 members, CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing much-needed services, helping to ensure that low-income immigrants can live rich and full lives. For over a decade, CASA has provided first and second generation immigrant high school students with culturally and linguistically relevant leadership development as well as college and career readiness.

As a member of both the Blueprint Coalition and the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, CASA played an instrumental role in the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and have been a strong supporter of culturally responsive implementation that addresses the immediate needs of our most vulnerable and historically marginalized community members, in particular our Black and Brown immigrant youth and their families. While the passage of the Blueprint was a significant step towards alleviating the inequities of our Maryland education system, its intended outcomes have yet to be fully realized. The General Assembly promised students, educators, and Maryland a "world class" education system that would lead to a thriving economy in which each individual can meet their full potential in the career that best aligns with their skills and interests, regardless of background and personal circumstance. However, SB 429 attempts to dramatically reduce funding for Maryland's world-class education system. At a time when the federal government is actively rolling back protections for marginalized communities, Maryland should be strengthening its investment in public education, not weakening it.

Senate Bill 429, introduces funding cuts, delays, and freezes that will disproportionately harm multilingual learners and those living in poverty. The Blueprint was developed through years of research, public hearings, and legislative debate. SB 429 threatens to undo that progress and jeopardizes the future of Maryland's students and schools.

The bill reduces the target per-pupil foundation amount every upcoming fiscal year which will mean fewer resources for classrooms, larger class sizes, and reduced instructional support. Furthermore, because funding for compensatory education students and multilingual learners is calculated as a percentage of the per-pupil foundation amount, any cuts to the foundation funding result in automatic reductions for these groups. Students who qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARM) receive additional funding based on a multiplier of the foundation amount. When the foundation is cut, the funding available for low-income students declines in lockstep. This means less money for intervention programs, tutoring, social-emotional supports, and wraparound services that help students from historically underfunded communities. Similarly, multilingual learners (MLs) receive supplemental funding based on the foundation formula. As the foundation amount shrinks, so does the funding for essential language services, teacher training, and curriculum adaptations that support our multilingual learners. ML students already face systemic barriers, and this bill will deepen those inequities.

The bill also proposes to stall the expansion of community schools that serve Maryland's most vulnerable students. These schools were promised additional support through the Blueprint to provide mental health care, after-school programs, multilingual services, and other essential wraparound supports. Community schools are a proven model for addressing achievement gaps. However, SB 429 deliberately freezes progress in these schools for two years. This means fewer counselors, fewer health services, and fewer academic interventions for students who need them most. Schools that were relying on these funds will be forced to make cuts, leaving students without access to necessary resources.

These changes to the current implementation of the Blueprint direct impact working-class and immigrant families and students. In order to best serve immigrant students and their families linguistically and culturally relevant programming and wraparound services are needed. Community schools in particular ensure that immigrant students thrive within our educational system and ultimately become contributing members of our economy and workforce.

CASA, along numerous education advocates, want to work closely with the Governor and the entire administration to find a solution that meets of balancing our State's budget without sacrificing our students' future or abandoning our promise to future generations of world-class public schools.

CASA respectfully asks the committee to uphold its commitment to equitable education and keep its promise to fully fund the Blueprint for Maryland's Future by submitting an unfavorable report on SB 429.