



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: March 12, 2025
RE: HB1066 – Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment
and Access – Membership and Workgroups

The MLLC supports HB1066 – Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access – Membership and Workgroups

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB1066.

HB1066 adds seven additional members to the Commission of Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access including individuals with expertise in providing harm reduction services, housing options for individuals with substance use disorder, and health care services to individuals experiencing homelessness as well as individuals with prior lived experiences with substance use disorder, seeking or receiving treatment for substance use disorder while incarcerated, participating in the drug court program, and expertise in drug policy reform. The bill also establishes an additional workgroup on improvement of health, social, and economic outcomes related to substance use. The workgroup must evaluate and review specified issues and make recommendations on changes to State laws, policies, and practices needed to mitigate the harms related to the criminalization of substance use with the goal of improving the public health and safety of residents of the State.

The following bill adds important provisions to further voice the lived experiences of Marylanders. While rates of substance use disorder (SUDs) remain lower for people of color, they are much more likely to be underdiagnosed and rates of SUDs are disproportionately on the rise among this group.¹ According to the Office of the Public Defender (OPD), court-mandated treatment for SUDs have varied success rates correlating with race and ethnicity, with Black and Hispanic referrals less likely to complete treatment programs and more likely to be incarcerated further than white referrals. This bill requires the study of outcomes when treatment is voluntary, which would allow racial and ethnic disparities between voluntary and court-ordered treatment outcomes to be compared and taken into account in recommendations to ensure that equity is better addressed when treatment decisions are made.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB1066.

¹ [Five Key Findings on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders by Race/Ethnicity](#)