



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

Lowe House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street, Room 200 · Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Phone 410-841-3374 | 301-858-3374 · 800-492-7122 Ext. 3374 · Fax 410-841-3342 | 301-858-3342
latino.caucus@house.state.md.us · www.mlatinocaucus.org

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TO: Senator William C. Smith Jr., Chair
Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: January 28, 2025
RE: SB25 – Family Law – Custody Evaluators – Qualifications

The MLLC supports SB25 – Family Law – Custody Evaluators – Qualifications 2025.

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 SB25.

This bill aims to establish specific qualifications for individuals appointed by courts as child custody evaluators. The bill defines a "custody evaluator" and outlines that courts may order assessments or appoint evaluators to aid in determining the best interests of a child in contested custody or visitation cases. To be appointed, a custody evaluator must be a licensed professional in fields such as psychiatry, psychology, marriage and family therapy, social work, or professional counseling, with equivalent licensure recognized across states. Additionally, evaluators are required to have completed training programs conforming to guidelines set by the Administrative Office of the Courts, possess experience in conducting custody evaluations, and maintain current knowledge in areas including domestic violence, child abuse, trauma, family dynamics, and the impacts of divorce on children and adults. The act is scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2025.

It is relevant to the Latino Caucus as it seeks to address inequities in child custody evaluations, which can disproportionately impact Latino families. Latino parents often face challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and implicit biases within the legal system. This bill emphasizes the need for custody evaluators to be culturally competent and trained to recognize and mitigate biases. Latino communities are often overrepresented in family court cases involving domestic violence or child welfare issues, these provisions ensure evaluations are fairer and more informed. By mandating stringent licensing and training requirements, the bill improves the quality and fairness of custody recommendations, ultimately supporting the rights and well-being of Latino families that are navigating the family court system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on SB25.