

**February 25, 2025**

The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Support for House Bill 579 – Criminal Procedure – U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions**

Dear Chair Clippinger and Esteemed Committee Members,

At Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), we are dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of Latino and immigrant communities throughout our state. Through our direct services, advocacy, and community engagement, we have seen firsthand the struggles that immigrant victims of crime face when seeking justice. Many fear reporting crimes due to concerns about their immigration status, lack of trust in the system, or language barriers. House Bill 579 proposes necessary reforms that would strengthen protections for these individuals, ensuring they can safely seek justice while contributing to the overall safety of our communities.

This legislation allows not only victims but also their attorneys, victim advocates, or other representatives to request certification of victim helpfulness. This ensures that victims, many of whom are Latino immigrants, have the necessary support when navigating a complex and often intimidating process. The bill also removes the statute of limitations concerning when a qualifying criminal activity occurred relative to the certification request. Trauma and fear may delay a victim's willingness or ability to come forward, and this change ensures that legal protections remain accessible whenever they are needed. Furthermore, if a certifying official determines that the available evidence does not support issuing a certification, HB 579 mandates a written explanation to the victim or their representative. This requirement provides transparency and ensures that individuals understand their rights and can take corrective action if needed.

For many Latino and immigrant victims, the fear of deportation and the complexities of the legal system create significant barriers to justice. HB 579 will help address these issues by strengthening protections, fostering greater trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities, and encouraging crime victims to come forward without fear. Additionally, the bill requires certifying entities to develop protocols to assist petitioners with limited English proficiency. This is a crucial step in ensuring that language does not serve as a barrier to justice and that all Maryland residents, regardless of their background, can access the protections they deserve.

MLU is committed to working alongside law enforcement agencies, certifying entities, and community organizations to ensure the successful implementation of HB 579. Through outreach, education, and advocacy, we will help ensure that our community members understand their rights and feel empowered to seek protection and justice.

We strongly urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 579. Enacting this bill will demonstrate Maryland's commitment to fostering inclusive, safe, and just communities for all residents, especially the most vulnerable.

**Sincerely,**

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