

**February 25, 2025**

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

**Support for House Bill 686 – Victims and Witnesses - U Nonimmigrant Status -  
Certification of Victim Helpfulness**

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 across our state. Through our work, we have witnessed the challenges that immigrant victims of crime face, particularly when seeking justice and protection. House Bill 686 addresses these challenges by streamlining the process for certifying victim helpfulness, thereby facilitating access to U Nonimmigrant Status for eligible individuals.

This legislation introduces a rebuttable presumption that a victim, or their representative, is considered helpful to law enforcement if they have not refused or failed to provide reasonably requested assistance. By establishing this presumption, HB 686 ensures that victims are not unjustly denied certification due to misunderstandings or miscommunications. Additionally, the bill reduces the timeframe within which certifying entities must respond to certification requests—mandating a response within 30 days generally, and within 7 days if the noncitizen victim is subject to removal or deportation proceedings. These expedited timelines are crucial in preventing unnecessary delays that could jeopardize the safety and legal standing of victims.

For many in our community, the fear of deportation serves as a significant barrier to reporting crimes or cooperating with law enforcement. By facilitating access to U Nonimmigrant Status, HB 686 not only provides a pathway for victims to gain temporary legal status but also fosters a climate of trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement agencies. This trust is essential for the effective detection, investigation, and prosecution of criminal activities, ultimately enhancing public safety for all Maryland residents.

Furthermore, the bill requires certifying entities to develop protocols to assist petitioners with limited English proficiency. This provision acknowledges the linguistic barriers that many victims face and ensures that language does not impede their access to justice and protection.

MLU is committed to collaborating with law enforcement agencies, certifying entities, and community organizations to ensure the successful implementation of HB 686. Through outreach and education, we aim to inform our communities about the protections available to them and encourage victims to come forward without fear.

We strongly urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 686. Enacting this legislation will affirm Maryland's commitment to supporting immigrant victims of crime and upholding the principles of justice and equity for all.

Sincerely,

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