



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: February 12, 2025
RE: HB543 – County Boards of Education – Substance Abuse
Treatment – Student Information Disclosure Policy

The MLLC supports HB543 – County Boards of Education – Substance Abuse Treatment – Student Information Disclosure Policy

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 HB543.

Chronic truancy is linked to a variety of negative outcomes, including substance abuse, mental health issues, and juvenile delinquency. Many students cite that their absenteeism stems from family instability, mental health struggles, or substance use disorders. 35% of chronically truant students are involved in substance abuse, making detox services a critical need in addressing absenteeism. School systems are limited in their ability to support truant students with significant substance abuse issues, highlighting the need for partnerships with health and detox services.¹ Programs like Maryland's Truancy Reduction Court demonstrate the need for multi-agency collaboration, showing a reduction in absenteeism by up to 83% after intervention.²

This bill proposes a partnership between detox facilities, the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), and local education systems to provide targeted interventions for chronically absent students under 21. The initiative focuses on offering detox services, especially for students dealing with substance abuse, while addressing the challenges of truancy. DJS will fund up to six months of detox services, and school systems will provide student records, including identification and truancy history, to help support these at-risk students.

Latino communities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their White counterparts. While White high school students in Maryland have a chronic absenteeism rate of 26.7%, Latino high school students have a rate of 47.8%.³ Chronic absenteeism leads to lower academic achievement, higher risk of being chronically absent in later grades, higher likelihood of dropping out of high school, negative health outcomes, and an increased likelihood of interacting

¹ [County Boards of Education – Substance Abuse Treatment – Student Information Disclosure Policy One Pager](#)

² Ibid

³ [Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots](#)

with the criminal justice system.⁴ The main reasons that students are chronically absent include illness, housing instability, need to work, and involvement with the juvenile justice system.⁵

This bill targets students before they become further involved in the juvenile justice system by addressing the root causes of their truancy—substance abuse and unstable home life. By intervening early, the bill aims to reduce the long-term costs of juvenile delinquency, saving the state on potential future legal and incarceration expenses.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB543.

⁴ [Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots](#)

⁵ Ibid