

February 10, 2025

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Maryland General Assembly
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for House Bill 523 – County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Esteemed Committee Members,

At Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), we believe that every child deserves a fair chance to succeed in school and beyond. House Bill 523, which requires county boards of education to investigate and report the root causes of chronic absenteeism and expulsion, is a critical step toward addressing one of the most pressing challenges in our education system.

We know that chronic absenteeism and expulsion are not just indicators of disengagement; they are warning signs of deeper issues. For many Latino students, these challenges are linked to systemic barriers—such as economic hardship, language access issues, and cultural disconnects—that make it harder to stay in school. HB523 takes an important step by not only acknowledging these root causes but also ensuring that they are investigated and addressed with transparency and accountability.

This bill has the potential to bring much-needed change. By focusing on the underlying causes, it opens the door for meaningful interventions that can help reduce absenteeism and keep students in the classroom where they belong. For our Latino community, this means more support, fewer punitive measures, and a stronger focus on equitable education policies that meet students where they are.

Education is not just about grades and test scores—it's about fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. HB523 recognizes that when we understand why students are struggling, we can provide the targeted support they need to succeed. This is especially crucial for students from immigrant and underserved communities, where a holistic approach can make all the difference in keeping them on track for graduation and future success.

We urge the Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on HB523. Together, we can create an educational environment that is supportive, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all Maryland students.

Sincerely,
Carlos Orbe, Jr.
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