



## 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.mdlatinocaucus.org

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TO: Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair  
Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair  
Ways and Means Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: February 12, 2025  
RE: HB523 – County Boards of Education – Root Causes of  
Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and  
Reporting

### **The MLLC supports HB523 – County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting**

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 HB523.

Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days, affects approximately 31% of Maryland students. Chronic absenteeism in Maryland disproportionately affects low-income and minority students, creating long-term educational and economic disparities. Across all grade levels, Latino communities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their White counterparts. For example, 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%.<sup>1</sup>

Chronic absenteeism leads to lower academic achievement, higher risk of being chronically absent in later graders, higher likelihood of dropping out of high school, negative health outcomes, and an increased likelihood of interacting with the criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> The main reasons that students are chronically absent include illness, housing instability, need to work, and involvement with the juvenile justice system.<sup>3</sup> Mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, are among the leading contributors to chronic absenteeism and disciplinary actions.<sup>4</sup>

This bill requires the County Boards of Education within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to identify the root causes of chronic absenteeism and expellable offenses. The study will examine contributing factors such as physical and mental health issues, addiction, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) considerations, and environmental factors like bullying, family vacations, and domestic challenges. The findings will guide data-driven interventions to improve student attendance and reduce disciplinary actions.

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<sup>1</sup> [Chronic Absenteeism Trends and Bright Spots](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> [County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting One Pager](#)

Data-driven approaches in other states have demonstrated significant improvements in attendance and student outcomes when root causes are addressed.<sup>5</sup> Without identifying root causes, interventions remain reactive rather than preventive, limiting their long-term effectiveness.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB523.

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<sup>5</sup> [County Boards of Education – Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion – Investigation and Reporting One Pager](#)