

March 2, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman

Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

2 West Miller Senate Office Building

11 Bladen Street

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for SB 685, Local School Systems, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct, Response Policy and After Action Review

Dear Chair Feldman,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for Senate Bill 685, Local School Systems, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct, Response Policy and After Action Review. This legislation requires the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a model response policy with required components, requires local school systems to adopt a response policy by July 1, 2027, and requires notices and after action reviews under specified circumstances.

Students deserve schools where safety is proactive, trauma informed, and consistent across jurisdictions. A model policy provides statewide clarity on reporting, coordination, communication with families, and the responsibilities of staff when allegations arise. After action reviews add a crucial layer of learning and accountability so that systems improve rather than repeating failures.

Child sexual abuse is a serious public health issue with lifelong impacts on mental health, educational attainment, and physical wellbeing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documents child sexual abuse as a form of child abuse with significant adverse consequences. Policies that standardize prevention and response are a necessary part of reducing harm, supporting survivors, and ensuring that schools act swiftly and appropriately.

This bill is particularly important for Latino and immigrant families navigating language barriers and unequal access to legal and mental health resources. Maryland's Hispanic or Latino residents make up 13.3 percent of the state population, and 16.6 percent of residents are foreign born. When families do not receive clear notices in a language they understand, or do not know their rights and options, misconduct can go unreported and support can be delayed. SB 685's emphasis on notice and structured review moves Maryland toward a system where every family receives timely information and every incident triggers improvement.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders include stronger confidence that schools will respond consistently, clearer pathways to culturally competent supports, and a greater likelihood

that survivors and families can access services without stigma or confusion. Strong policy also protects staff by clarifying roles, expectations, and training needs.

MLU urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 685, ensuring Maryland school systems respond to sexual abuse and sexual misconduct with urgency, transparency, and accountability.

Sincerely,

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