

March 2, 2026

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary Bartlett

Chair, Judiciary Committee

101 House Office Building

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 1039, Education, Primary and Secondary Schools, Alternative School Options, Right to Learn Act

Dear Chair Bartlett,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for House Bill 1039, Education, Primary and Secondary Schools, Alternative School Options, Right to Learn Act. This legislation requires annual notice to parents or guardians of students attending a failing school, requires conditions for continuing a failing school designation, and requires that a student attending a failing school be provided the opportunity to attend an alternative school, among other provisions.

Families cannot advocate for better outcomes when they are not informed, and students cannot thrive when the system treats persistent school failure as normal. HB 1039 strengthens transparency and creates a clearer pathway for families to access alternative options when schools are not meeting basic expectations. Information is power, and in education, timely notice can determine whether a child receives intervention early or falls further behind.

Maryland's attendance and engagement challenges reinforce the need for clear, family centered strategies. State Board materials show chronic absence rates varied widely across local education agencies, ranging from 17 percent to 49 percent in school year 2023 to 2024. Chronic absence and school performance challenges often overlap, and families need accessible options and support when the current environment is not working.

This bill is particularly important for Latino and immigrant families. Maryland is 13.3 percent Hispanic or Latino and 16.6 percent foreign born. Families navigating language access barriers or unfamiliar school systems can be left out of critical decisions about interventions, transfers, and academic supports. Requiring consistent annual information strengthens the likelihood that families receive actionable guidance and can engage in planning that meets a student's needs.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders include greater transparency, clearer pathways to alternatives, and stronger leverage for parents and guardians seeking safe, supportive, and academically effective placements. With proper implementation and equity

guardrails, HB 1039 can expand opportunity and reduce the likelihood that students remain trapped in chronically underperforming environments.

MLU urges the Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1039, supporting the right of every child to learn in an environment that meets basic standards of quality, safety, and accountability.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist

Maryland Latinos Unidos

corbejr@mdlatinosunidos.org