

February 9, 2026

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary

Chair, Ways and Means Committee

131 Lowe House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 352, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program, Eligible Uses

Dear Chair Atterbeary,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) respectfully submits this letter in strong support of House Bill 352, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program, Eligible Uses, which is under consideration by the House Ways and Means Committee. This bill expands allowable uses of grant funds so schools serving high poverty student populations can address barriers that directly affect learning and student well being.

Schools with high concentrations of poverty face challenges that extend beyond academics, including food insecurity, chronic absenteeism, mental health needs, and limited access to enrichment opportunities. According to the Maryland State Department of Education, schools serving predominantly low income students and students of color experience higher rates of unmet social and emotional needs, which directly correlate with academic outcomes. Latino students are disproportionately represented in these school communities. Source <https://marylandpublicschools.org>.

HB 352 provides flexibility so schools can invest in supports such as wraparound services, family engagement initiatives, and targeted interventions that respond to community needs. Evidence from the Learning Policy Institute shows that integrated student supports and community school models improve attendance, graduation rates, and academic performance, particularly in high poverty schools. Source <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org>.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders

For Latino students and families, HB 352 expands opportunity by allowing schools to address the real conditions that shape learning outcomes. When schools can respond to food access, mental health, and family engagement needs, students are more likely to succeed academically and remain connected to their school communities. MLU can amplify these impacts by partnering with schools to support family outreach, culturally responsive engagement strategies, and connections to community based services that strengthen student success.

MLU urges the Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 352.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist

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