



February 15, 2021

Chairman Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: CASA Testimony in SUPPORT of HB478

Dear Honorable Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

We are writing to express our strong support for HB478, establishing modest increases to surcharges on certain filing fees to help fund the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). CASA is the largest membership-based immigrant rights organization in the mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 100,000 Black and Latino immigrants and working families. Our mission is to create a more just society by building power and improving the quality of life in working class and immigrant communities. We envision a future where our members stand in their own power, our families live free from discrimination and fear, and our diverse communities thrive as we work with our partners to achieve full human rights for all.

One way that CASA helps realize our mission is through legal services, generously supported by grant funds from MLSC. Every year, CASA provides legal consultations, referrals and case assistance to thousands of Marylanders seeking help with their legal issues. Many of our clients are first-generation immigrants, some of them recent newcomers to the United States. They come to CASA because they trust us to give them honest advice and provide culturally competent services, pointing them in the right direction as they try to navigate issues with immigration, employment or housing, among myriad other topics. Without the support of MLSC, CASA would be much more limited in our ability to engage these members of the community and many of them would have nowhere else to turn.

MLSC funding is so crucial to CASA in part because it allows us to provide assistance to Marylanders regardless of where they live. Although we are fortunate to have the support of many County and local jurisdictions in Maryland, these funding streams rightly prioritize their residents for access to services. With CASA's reach across Maryland, it is vital that we have access to sources of funding that allow us to serve communities where local and county governments may not be in a position to offer the same level of investment in nonprofits that support their residents. Over the last five years we have served individuals from an increasing number of jurisdictions in Maryland, with CASA's legal team recently reaching residents from sixteen different Maryland counties. This would have been impossible without the support of MLSC.

CASA's legal team focuses on serving community members in the areas of immigration, housing and employment. Often, the individuals we serve would not be able to access services elsewhere, either because of funding restrictions related to their immigration status, language barriers or lack of knowledge about what services are available. CASA's innovative model, combining strong community organizing with service delivery, seeks to break down those barriers and connect underserved Marylanders with the assistance they need – while simultaneously fostering in them a sense of agency and empowerment that extends beyond the scope of any individual service we may offer. Each year we help hundreds of Marylanders get immigration benefits like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), recover tens of thousands of dollars in wages owed to some of Maryland's poorest residents, and help to keep a roof over the heads of those who are at risk of housing insecurity.

As our communities face some of the greatest challenges we have ever seen, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and severe economic disruption associated with it, it is more vital than ever that we have the resources available to continue to serve our members. MLSC is a vital partner in meeting that need and for all of these reasons CASA strongly supports HB417 and urges a favorable report from the committee.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Katz, Esq.

Legal Director
CASA

