



## **Testimony in Support**

### **HB7726 Health and Safety of Pupils**

**3/12/24**

Dear House Education Committee Members,

The Latino Policy Institute writes to express our strong support for bill H7726, which seeks to reform the process of public school closures, mergers and phase-outs. This legislation is not just about improving processes; it's about safeguarding the rights and interests of our communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by such decisions.

H7726 mandates critical steps that prioritize the voices of stakeholders and ensure their concerns are addressed throughout the decision-making process. By requiring public school districts and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to publicly announce proposals and provide detailed reports on building conditions, enrollment trends, and other relevant data, this bill fosters increased transparency. This transparency is vital for communities, especially those historically marginalized, to understand the reasons behind proposed closures and the potential impacts on their neighborhoods.

Furthermore, the legislation's emphasis on community engagement through a series of meetings and public forums is commendable. Allowing stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, and the wider community, to actively participate, voice concerns, and provide feedback is crucial for building trust and ensuring decisions align with the needs of the people they affect.

The provision of detailed contingency plans for affected families, students (including those with special education needs), and staff underscores the commitment to minimizing disruption and ensuring a smooth transition. Clear communication and thorough planning are key to mitigating the negative effects of school closures, mergers, or phase-outs, particularly on vulnerable populations.

Additionally, H7726 holds public school districts and education departments accountable for their decisions by establishing a timeline for final decision-making and requiring them to justify proposals and incorporate community feedback into final plans. This level of accountability is essential in upholding standards and procedures that prioritize the well-being of our communities and the integrity of our public education system.

It's important to recognize that past school closures have disproportionately affected communities of color, leading to disruptions in education, loss of cultural identity, and economic hardship. Approaching school closure decisions with sensitivity and awareness of historical trauma is crucial to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities. The H7726 bill acknowledges this reality and seeks to rectify past injustices by ensuring that decisions

regarding public school facilities are made with the utmost consideration for equity and fairness.

In conclusion, the Latino Policy Institute strongly supports the H7726 bill for its commitment to transparency, community engagement, improved planning, and accountability in decisions regarding public school closures, mergers, or phase-outs. We urge the committee to advance this legislation to ensure an equitable future for all students and communities across our state. Thank you for considering our testimony.

Awilda Reinoso Lopez  
Policy Associate  
Latino Policy Institute

