

Testimony on HB 1222 - Favorable with Amendments
HB 1222- Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement (Maryland Values Act)
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 27, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, and Members of the Committee,

I, Dr. Karen C. Woodson of the Community Workgroup on English Language Learners, offer a **favorable with amendment** testimony in support of **HB 1222- Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement (Maryland Values Act)**

As a former public school educator and principal with over 35 years of experience in Maryland, I witnessed firsthand the unique multifaceted needs of our immigrant communities. Working with scores of talented educators, we dedicated ourselves to removing barriers and creating equitable opportunities to ensure that students from immigrant communities thrive academically, just like any other students under our charge. As co-chair of the Beloved Community Committee at Village Baptist Church in Bowie, Maryland, I participated in the Interfaith Day of Action for Immigrant Justice in Annapolis on March 24, 2025. I am steadfast in my commitment to seek justice for all marginalized groups, including immigrant communities, as my faith teaches that we are to seek justice and stand up for vulnerable populations, such as immigrants and their children (Isaiah 1:17).

At its core, this bill is about upholding Maryland's values—fairness, dignity, and justice for all. The Maryland Values Act affirms that our state should not be in the business of tearing families apart, undermining public trust, or funneling state and local resources into a federal deportation agenda. Instead, Maryland should stand firm in its commitment to community safety, due process, and equal treatment under the law - by ending 287(g).

The 287(g) program has a well-documented history of racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detentions. It diverts local law enforcement from their primary duty of protecting public safety, forcing them to act as immigration agents rather than community protectors. This erodes trust, particularly among immigrant communities, making people less likely to report crimes or seek help when needed. Ending 287(g) ensures Maryland's resources are used to foster public safety—not help the federal deportation agenda.

As a former principal, I witnessed the deep trauma experienced by children who lived each day with the fear that a parent might not be home when they returned from school—detained or deported by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This constant fear created an emotional burden no child should carry, often manifesting in anxiety, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, and chronic absenteeism. The trauma of family separation reverberates throughout immigrant communities, disrupting stability, trust, and a sense of safety. Many of the parents who faced deportation were brought to this country as infants or young children and have known no other home; they built their lives here, worked hard, and raised U.S.-born children who are now left to navigate the world without their primary caregivers. These children—citizens of this country—suffer deeply

when a parent is torn away. Their emotional well-being, academic performance, and overall development are jeopardized by a system that punishes families for circumstances beyond their control. As educators, we are tasked with creating safe and nurturing learning environments, yet we are helpless in shielding our students from the devastating impacts of these policies. Family separation is not just an immigration issue—it is a child welfare crisis, and our schools and communities are bearing the weight of its consequences.

As part of the Maryland Immigrant Justice Table, along with CASA, **we support a clean bill that removes the amendments added to the bill in the Judiciary Committee that require notification and transfer to ICE.** The sole purpose of this legislation is to end 287(g) agreements in Maryland, not to create or mandate new forms of collaboration with ICE. Local jurisdictions already have the discretion to engage with ICE if they choose; ending 287(g) agreements does not limit that existing authority. **We strongly support a clean bill that aligns with the original intentions of the legislation - to simply terminate 287(g) agreements in Maryland.** This is what will bring Maryland closer to our values.

I, Dr. Karen C. Woodson, **urge the committee to provide a favorable report with amendments on HB 1222.**