

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 828

Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations - Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

House Judiciary Committee

Hearing date: March 26, 2025

From: Laura Atwood, Silver Spring, MD

Dear Honorable Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee:

I live in D20 and am pleased to offer **a favorable testimony in strong support of SB 828.**

I'm a physical therapist, and I currently work in a rehab unit of a hospital system; I have also worked in home health. I routinely go from meeting a stranger to knowing that person's most private health and often psychosocial concerns. When people are in vulnerable health and cannot function independently (short-term or long-term), they rely on medical care, and they also rely on larger family and/or social networks.

My healthcare work also gives me practice seeing the deep humanity of every single person I encounter, and I bring that perspective to larger social justice issues, including immigration.

For over a decade, federal policy limited Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activities in sensitive locations—such as hospitals, schools, courthouses, and places of worship—to prevent intimidation and ensure access to essential services. However, as of January 20, 2025, the revocation of these protections has left immigrant communities vulnerable to enforcement actions in spaces where they should feel safe.

This shift has already created an environment of fear and uncertainty, discouraging individuals from seeking medical care, pursuing education, accessing legal resources, or engaging with law enforcement. As a result, our communities, public health, and overall safety are at risk.

During the first Trump administration and early Covid pandemic, I remember someone asking me: "My friend [without papers] wants to know, if she can't breathe, is it safe to go to a hospital?" I could confidently tell her: "It is safe immigration-wise, and it would be dangerous healthwise not to." But now?

It is vital for people to get healthcare. And while in the hospital, many patients are scared—so especially if they have severe anxiety and/or confusion (have you ever spent the night in a hospital alone?!), family members or private caregivers often stay with them for extended periods. Those support people also need to be, and feel, safe. And once those patients go home, they rely on their support systems; if the nephew who carries them down the stairs for medical appointments, or the "like-family" neighbor who fills their weekly pillbox, vanishes suddenly—not good.

Everyone should access essential services without fear of detention or separation. **I therefore urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 828.**