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Testimony on SB0828 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Immigration Enforcement – Sensitive Locations – Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Batlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Andrew Miller. I am a resident of District 11B, Chair of the Social Justice Advocacy Committee at Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Stevenson, MD, and Chair of the Synagogue Social Justice Roundtable, which has representatives from synagogue communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0828.

Our sacred texts command us to love the stranger, as we ourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt, and many of our families came to the United States to escape persecution. For me and for many in my community, protection of immigrants is therefore a sacred obligation. For the last several years our congregation and others have worked in support of Afghan refugee families fleeing the Taliban by providing direct support with the help of refugee relief organizations working in collaboration with the federal government.

Many of us have also worked over the last 8 years, together with immigrant support organizations, to protect the rights of other immigrants who arrived in our country to take refuge from oppressive conditions elsewhere in the world. In 2019 and 2020 I was asked by a small volunteer organization to help a father and his young son who were living in a trailer park in Howard County; he was not authorized to work and could not earn money needed for basic necessities. He had left his home in Central America after his wife died and gangs burned down his fields and threatened to kill him and his son. It was not an idle threat; tens of thousands of innocent civilians in his country have been murdered either by gangs or by the military over the last several decades. Yet the current federal administration is currently dismantling and obstructing access to asylum in this country.

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. Immigrants are important contributors to our economy and to our communities here in Maryland, where

they make up 17% of the population. Crime rates among immigrant populations are much lower than in the general U.S. population.

On Saturday March 22 our synagogue hosted a conversation, which my wife and I organized, with Mark Hetfield, CEO of HIAS, a nonprofit organization that has had a 40+ year relationship with the federal government helping to resettle refugees from dozens of countries and to support them in their own countries when resettlement was not possible. That support has now been terminated by executive order, and thousands of people who had already been vetted and approved to come to the U.S. are now stranded without any source of assistance. The situation is dire, and Maryland must act to prevent equally cruel consequences for immigrants and refugees who are already living here in our state.

The Rabbi of my Conservative synagogue in Baltimore County participated in a call with the Rabbinical Assembly last month, during which all synagogues were given guidance to prepare for the possibility of ICE agents entering our buildings with the goal of trying to find and detain employees or others who might be undocumented immigrants. If this is a concern even for suburban synagogues, how much greater the risk facing churches, schools, and hospitals in neighborhoods with large immigrant populations where ICE expects to be able to find and detain those who are undocumented.

In a hearing last month, I heard the Maryland Director of ICE promise that these things will never happen. But they are already starting to happen. ICE is being pushed to detain more people and has already violated constitutional rights and deported people without due process, and some of those deported were labeled as criminals when in fact they had no criminal record. People are now afraid to access health care, schools, and other support systems. Our communities, public health, and overall safety are at risk. Last week we learned that people were being held under inhumane conditions in a holding room in the Federal Building in Baltimore for as long as seven days with little or no food, without access to medicine, sleeping on cement floors with no bedding, and deprived of contact with family or lawyers. This is an outrage. With the help of our Maryland legislators we must erect legal barriers to the contemptuous and unconstitutional violation of rights by the current federal administration.

Everyone should access essential services without fear of detention or separation. Public safety improves when immigrants feel safe reporting crimes and seeking help. Clear enforcement boundaries build trust, strengthening communities and institutions. For these reasons, I **urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB0828.**