
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB828
Immigration Enforcement - Sensitive Locations- Guidelines and Policies
(Protecting Sensitive Locations Act)
House Judiciary Committee
March 24, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 828, which seeks to ameliorate the impact of the repeal of the federal policy that limited ICE access to sensitive locations.¹ This bill requires the Attorney General to develop guidelines to limit immigration enforcement at sensitive locations in Maryland - including public schools, public libraries, and state run healthcare facilities, and other public gathering places - as allowable under federal and state law. **SWASC strongly believes in Marylanders' right to live, access resources, and gather in community spaces without fear of ICE presence, thereby promoting greater well-being for all community members.**

Protecting schools as sensitive locations ensures students' right to an education. As a social work intern at a Maryland high school, I have seen the increase in stress, anxiety and worry caused by the threat of ICE's presence on the immigrant community. This has affected our students' attendance, ability to pay attention in class, and overall mental health symptoms and wellness. Data supports these trends we are seeing at our school. In 2020, schools in districts with high deportation rates showed a higher achievement gap between Latino and white students in math as well as increased absenteeism.² School attendance has been impacted for students with friends or family affected by ICE raids, such as a case in a Tennessee school in April 2018 where 500 students were absent the day after a raid.³ Witnessing an arrest can be traumatic for the family members, the students, and staff who are present. A report by the Migration Policy Institute finds that the threat of deportation led to trauma originating from witnessing a family member be arrested.⁴ **By creating guidelines for sensitive locations, the Maryland Attorney General has the potential to support the principles of the 14th Amendment, which ensures all people in the US the right to a public education.**

ICE presence in schools decreases public safety, negatively affecting the school climate. School can serve as a positive influence for students, increasing their

¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2025) *Statement from a DHS Spokesperson on Directives Expanding Law Enforcement and Ending the Abuse of Humanitarian Parole*. [Press Release].

<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/01/21/statement-dhs-spokesperson-directives-expanding-law-enforcement-and-ending-abuse>

² Kirksey, J.J. et al. (2020) Deportations Near the Schoolyard: Examining Immigration Enforcement and Racial/Ethnic Gaps in Educational Outcomes. *AERA Open*, 6(1). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858419899074>

³ American Immigration Council. (2021) *U.S. citizen children impacted by Immigration Enforcement* Available at: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement>

⁴ North Carolina Justice Center. (2017) *The ACE of ICE: How Current Immigration Enforcement and Deportation Hurts Children*.

well-being, achievement, and development. However, when students are alienated by racism and fear, they cannot successfully participate in school. Exclusionary, unwelcoming, and unsafe environments negatively impact the overall school climate. According to an UnidosUS survey, 92% of educators responded that their classroom climate has been affected by enforcement concerns, impacting their students' ability to learn. More than 50% reported observing increases in verbal and physical bullying and harassment of students based on their perceived immigration status.⁵ In contrast, a positive school climate can positively influence the health of children and school personnel, both educationally and psychologically. It can promote higher morale and improve student achievement, preparing them for success beyond the school environment.⁶ SB 828 would decrease the fear of ICE presence in schools, helping students feel safer and less targeted, therefore supporting their well-being and success in school.

Protecting sensitive locations promotes Marylanders' access to health. From late 2016, doctors and service providers have seen an increase in the number of children showing stress and anxiety related to behavioral changes such as toxic stress due to one family member being deported.⁷ By designating hospitals or other health institutions as sensitive locations, SB 828 takes steps to protect children and family's access to care.

Protecting courthouses as sensitive locations ensures noncitizens the right to a fair trial. Noncitizens face intimidation when deciding to go to court, uncertain if ICE will be waiting outside or if court staff and prosecutors are collaborating with ICE. As ICE arrests go up, noncitizens are increasingly not appearing in court out of fear, resulting in losing their constitutional right to a jury trial.⁸ A study found that 77% of professionals working with immigrants in court reported that their clients expressed fear of pursuing the cases or appearing in court due to the risk of arrest or detention by ICE.⁹

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 828 to protect people's fundamental rights, maintain public safety, and demonstrate Maryland's commitment to the well-being of its residents.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁵ UnidosUS. (2020) *A Generation at Risk: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on UnidosUS-Affiliated Classrooms and Educators*.

⁶ Kutsyuruba, B., Klinger, D. A., & Hussain, A. (2015) Relationships among school climate, school safety, and student achievement and well-being: a review of the literature. *Review of Education*, 3(2), 103-135.

⁷ Kirksey, J.J. et al. (2020) Deportations Near the Schoolyard: Examining Immigration Enforcement and Racial/Ethnic Gaps in Educational Outcomes. *AERA Open*, 6(1).

⁸ Basu, S. (2020) ICE-d out of Court: Courthouse Arrests and the Sixth Amendment Right to a Jury Trial for Noncitizen Defendants. *UC Irvine L. Rev.*, 11, 851.

⁹ Gordon, P., Grady, K., & Stephenson, S. (2019) Obstructing justice: the chilling effect of ICE's arrests of immigrants at Pennsylvania's courthouses. *The Sheller Center for Social Justice*.