



Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1018

Correctional Services - Immigration Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Dear Honorable Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

CASA is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in support of HB 1018 Correctional Services - Immigration Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards.**

CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 189,000 members, CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of its members. For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our members closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond. We write in strong support of HB1018 and urge the Committee to advance strong protections to end the harms of civil immigration detention. CASA members have experienced egregious human rights violations at the hands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) first hand, and their stories guide our testimony today.

A. The Meaning and Impact of HB 1018

HB 1018 extends and enhances minimum mandatory standards on the custody, care and conditions of incarcerated individuals to those subjected to civil detention, which includes immigration detention by ICE. Despite Maryland having put an end to immigration detention many years ago, the issue has resurfaced in the form of unlawful, abusive, prolonged confinement of individuals suspected of immigration violations in the Baltimore Hold Room, alongside active efforts to increase ICE detention in the state. This bill ensures that critical compliance mechanisms and enforcement tools governing corrections facilities in Maryland are also applicable to civil confinement. In the event of violations of these detention standards, HB 1018 authorizes the Attorney General to bring actions against private operators of such facilities and allows the Maryland Commission on Correctional Standards to order the closure of facilities where life or health are endangered.

B. The federal administration’s ongoing mass detention and mass deportation agenda does not align with Maryland values.

In 2021, Maryland took the brave step of passing the Dignity not Detention Act (“DND”), restricting immigration detention in Maryland. At the time, ICE paid county jails in Howard, Worcester, and Frederick to incarcerate hundreds of non-citizens for civil, non-criminal immigration violations. DND not only mandated the termination of these contracts, but banned any new contracts or renewal of existing contracts with detention facilities operated wholly or in part by private corporations. Now, the federal government is aggressively ramping up its efforts to use all means necessary to purchase land itself for new facilities in Maryland. Given this context and the Baltimore Hold Room’s use as a de facto detention facility with cruel and inhumane conditions, it is critical that the state act now to establish minimum mandatory standards for any immigration detention, to prevent ICE’s further violations of human rights and the law.

C. HB 1018 properly reigns in unconstitutional immigration detention that imposes the equivalent of cruel and unusual punishment on Marylanders suspected of civil, non-criminal immigration violations.

Immigration detention is inherently traumatic. By law, immigration detention is considered civil and supposedly non-punitive. In practice, it is jail by another name, without criminal charges or convictions. Detainees wear color-coded prison-style uniforms and are monitored by guards constantly. There is no free movement. Access to the outdoor recreation yards is limited to a few hours a day. Detainees do not have access to free phone calls, much less the internet. Although the experience is indistinguishable from jail, our society operates under the legal fiction that because immigration detention is nominally civil and non-punitive, conditions are not governed by the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and thus, detainees do not have a right to a government-provided attorney. Instead they are left to fight their complex cases from behind bars, without access to the resources they need to argue their case, often fearing for their lives if they are deported.

The inherent trauma of detention is exacerbated by the deplorable conditions inside ICE detention centers and the context in which it is carried out. The entire country bore witness to the devastating and destructive practice of family separation under the Trump administration, with images and sounds of “kids in cages” inciting a popular uprising against the inhumane practices of our immigration enforcement machine. Victims of this abuse will never recover from the trauma they experienced - and Maryland was complicit in it, with several of those parents under ICE custody in Anne Arundel county, which contracted with ICE at the time.

D. ICE continues to subject Marylanders to egregious detention conditions and rights violations here in Maryland and across the country, making HB 1018 critical.

We highlighted the story of Kilmar Abrego Garcia in our testimony in support of the Dignity not Detention Act in 2021. We shared the trauma that he and his then-pregnant fiance experienced when he was arrested by ICE and held at the Howard County jail for almost eight months until he eventually won his immigration case. As has been reported worldwide, Kilmar was whisked off the streets of Maryland in March 2025 and, without any opportunity for a hearing or notice, transferred to the Salvadoran Terrorism Confinement Center CECOT where he was beaten and held in inhumane conditions. Kilmar's story was unremarkable then, and sadly, it is unremarkable now. ICE's unlawful, mass detention and deportation operations have devastated and traumatized our immigrant community over the past year, with its impact reaching unprecedented levels today.

In our operation of the main ICE Raid Response Hotline in Maryland, CASA has received disturbing reports of abuse and rights violations of Marylanders arrested and detained in Maryland and beyond. Below are some of their stories, with pseudonyms used to protect their privacy.

Yolanda was detained by ICE on June 2, 2025 when she attended an appointment in Baltimore. ICE officers asked her to sign an immigration document. When she refused to sign, they hit her and held her hand and signed for her. She also reported suffering from an illness related to high blood pressure, yet ICE did not provide medication and refused to receive medication for her. They claimed being unable to provide prescription drugs to civil detainees, even if they were in receipt of the detainees' medical reports and prescriptions.

On June 12, 2025, *Arnoldo* was on his way to work when he was surrounded by 10 unmarked vehicles by a Seven Eleven in Prince George's County. In addition to the federal officers detaining him, they also went to his home to detain his brother and nephew that same day. In the Baltimore Hold Room, he reported having to remain standing in a cell with over forty people, with no food or proper bathroom access. They threatened him that if he did not sign a deportation order giving up his rights to due process, he would be sent to Africa or CECOT. He eventually relented and signed.

On September 16th, 2025, *Harold* was detained in Washington, D.C. while on his way to work from Maryland, beaten, and threatened with death. An officer told him "I don't like Guatemalans, and if I want to, I can shoot you in the head." After being detained, he was handcuffed for more than 24 hours without food or water. When given food, he and fellow detainees were still handcuffed at their hands and feet.

Jose was detained at an ICE check-in on September 29th, 2025 at Hopkins Plaza in Baltimore. He was transferred to a detention facility near the border, where he reports he was tortured for 8 hours over two days by as many as 12 immigration officers. They tied his hands, feet and mouth, beat him endlessly, and placed a bag over his head in an effort to make him state that he was from Mexico so that they could hand him over to Mexican officials. He also reported having gone 16 hours without food without required medication for his heart problems.

Ikenna, a Prince George's County resident, asylum seeker and city government employee, was taken into ICE custody in April 2025 based on a meritless assault charge that never resulted in a conviction. Until the charges against him were dropped, he was held in inhumane ICE detention conditions in New Mexico. He reported that officers handcuffed him so tightly that they broke his wrist. The facility was overcrowded, with rooms designed for twenty people holding around fifty detainees. There were widespread leaks, and toilet water would enter the cafeteria. After his release, ICE has refused to even temporarily remove his ankle monitor so he may get an MRI to confirm the damage to his wrists.

While these individual stories are horrifying, it is even more disturbing to consider that they are merely examples of ICE abuses of power, excessive use of force, and cruelly punitive confinement that are now rampant across the nation. This has led to at least 29 deaths in ICE Custody in 2025 alone, the highest level of reported deaths in over two decades. States, including Maryland, have a critical responsibility at this time to uphold fundamental constitutional rights and protect the nation against a descent into authoritarianism.

It is important to note that these human rights abuses occur regardless of whether a state has dedicated long-term immigration detention facilities or merely temporary detention hold rooms. In an effort to comply with deportation quotas, immigration detention centers across the country are operating at maximum capacity and without oversight.

E. Maryland must do everything in our power to curb the ongoing human rights violations by ICE, protect our community and keep families together, and HB 1018 supports this effort.

Beyond amounting to cruel and unusual punishment, immigration detention tears families apart in ways that traumatize children and make us all less safe. It also disproportionately targets low-income workers who work backbreaking jobs in service of the U.S. economy. Below are additional stories from our members, with their privacy protected using pseudonyms, that highlight the terror ICE has been sowing in immigrant families right here in Maryland.

At 6am on November 1st, 2025, *Margot* woke up to make breakfast for her family in Baltimore. She was in the basement unit of a house with her family, including her brother. While Margot

was cooking, she heard ICE officials knocking on the door. The people who live above them let them in and the officials came down the stairs. They pointed a gun at Margot and broke into her brother's room. They beat him and took him away.

On June 26, 2025, *Richard* was on his way to buy his daughter a birthday present when ICE violently detained him. We supported his partner, the mother left behind in Catonsville, whose two-year-old daughter was no longer able to celebrate her birthday with her father. On July 26, 2025, *Johannes* was surrounded by unmarked vehicles in front of a Home Depot along with about twenty-five other day laborers. ICE agents used these vehicles to block all exit points and detain them all. Johannes had entered as a child and was in the process of seeking asylum. On November 10, 2025, *Maria* was stopped for driving with expired license plates and thereafter detained by ICE. ICE had seemingly no consideration for alternatives to detention in light of her six children, who were left to be cared for by a neighbor.

These stories highlight the urgent need for additional measures limiting inhumane ICE detention in our state, as the effort to deport as many individuals as possible has resulted in tragic violence against community members who are fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. An ill-informed quota-based system and the elimination of prosecutorial discretion have led to ICE going after anyone they can get their hands on and often detaining people in the middle of active status applications while leaving their children at risk of hunger and homelessness.

F. Maryland must continue to prohibit ICE from operating inhumane detention centers in our state and use every avenue to hold them accountable, and HB 1018 provides a critical avenue.

By extending minimum standards for carceral facilities to immigration detention and creating strong compliance and enforcement mechanisms, HB 1018 helps ensure Maryland does not become complicit in unsafe confinement conditions and rights violations. Overcrowding, lack of basic food and drink, and the absence of beds and proper medical care are not what Maryland stands for. Moreover, these conditions violate detainees' Fifth Amendment right to due process under the U.S. Constitution by subjecting civil detainees to punitive confinement conditions. HB 1018 creates accountability to protect against such rights violations. Its minimum mandatory standards address safety, including fire risks and risks to life, housing, and hygiene, maximum occupancy, food services, detainee classification, and proper recordkeeping, with audits, hearing opportunities and legal actions to address reported violations.

It is time for Maryland to put an end to any loopholes that allow civil, non-criminal detention facilities— which disproportionately target Black and Brown low-income, working-class communities—to escape minimum oversight and constitutional accountability.

For these reasons, CASA urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1018.