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Position: Concerned Maryland Resident

Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections

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Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1017. This legislation would prohibit the State or a unit of local government from approving the use of a building or structure as an immigration detention facility by a private entity unless certain zoning authority applies; establish penalties for violations; and authorize the Attorney General to bring civil actions to enforce the law.

I support HB1017 because it ensures transparency, community involvement, and local planning oversight in decisions that deeply affect neighborhoods, public safety, property values, and the lives of detained individuals.

Zoning decisions should be local, transparent, and accountable.

Allowing private entities to convert existing buildings to immigration detention centers without appropriate zoning review circumvents the established process by which communities plan for housing, commercial activity, traffic, emergency services, and infrastructure. Zoning regulations exist to ensure that land uses are compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and reflect community standards and priorities.

HB1017 makes clear that facilities housing detained individuals, even under civil immigration law, are not exempt from the same planning rules that apply to other institutional uses. This builds trust, respects local governance, and helps avoid unexpected impacts on residents, schools, and local services.

Clear enforcement and penalties matter.

By creating a penalty for zoning violations and authorizing the Attorney General to pursue civil enforcement, HB1017 ensures that the law has teeth. This deters unauthorized conversions that could burden communities and helps ensure that private operators follow the rules designed to protect public welfare.

This bill balances important values:

- Respect for local control and planning authority.
- Protection for vulnerable populations by ensuring facilities meet community-established standards.

- Accountability for private operators who might otherwise bypass zoning safeguards.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB1017.

Thank you.