

Testimony on House Bill - Favorable
HB 1017 - Private Immigration Detention Facilities, Zoning Requirement
House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee Hearing
February 12, 2026

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

We are writing to urge you to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1017.

Montgomery County Immigrant Rights Collective (MoCo IRC) submits this testimony in support of HB 1017, an emergency measure to prohibit the State or units of local government from approving the use of buildings for private immigration detention facilities through zoning loopholes.

Our coalition works directly with impacted Maryland families and operates in coalition with immigration attorneys, organizers, and community allies across the DMV region. We help connect families impacted by immigration detention or deportation with legal resources, financial aid, and community support. Our position is informed by firsthand experience responding to the harms these facilities cause, which are predictable and preventable.

From a public health perspective, immigration detention centers are notorious sites of systemic harm. Maryland must do everything in its power to prevent their existence in our state. Individuals held in immigration detention experience significantly elevated rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal ideation, not to mention the risk of death at the hands of ICE, which, in an increasing number of instances, are coming to the attention of the public. Medical neglect is widespread in private facilities, where profit-driven cost cutting seeks to limit access to timely and adequate care. These conditions do not remain confined within facility walls; the prioritization of profit over wellness also endangers facility staff and destabilizes surrounding communities. We strongly believe the existence of immigration detention centers must be understood as a public health emergency, not merely a policy choice.

There are also serious environmental and land-use impacts associated with these facilities, especially when spaces which were never meant to house people are converted into detention centers. Makeshift prisons place increased strain on local wastewater systems, energy infrastructure, roads, and exist as a testament to the broader inhumanity of our draconian "law enforcement" system. Communities are rarely informed about these risks in advance, and environmental review processes are often bypassed when detention facilities are approved under purposefully vague zoning classifications done in bad faith. HB 1017 addresses this directly by requiring explicit zoning authorization and preventing detention facilities from being complacently approved as generic "government" uses.

From an economic perspective, private immigration detention facilities consistently fail to deliver any benefits to local communities. They create relatively few long-term jobs, while the separation of families to fill quotas in these facilities overwhelms already understaffed and

underfunded local emergency services and social service systems. Local communities bear the burden and experience the harm, while private corporations extract profit from the incarceration of our neighbors.

One local example is the Farmville Detention Center in Farmville, Virginia. That privately-operated facility became a COVID-19 hotspot, contributing to widespread infection among detained individuals, staff, and the surrounding rural community. Despite claims that the facility would benefit the local economy, the town surrounding Farmville has not experienced meaningful or lasting economic improvement as a result of the detention center, but rather, profits have trickled away from the local economy and straight to private prison corporations like Abyon and CoreCivic.

It is important to note that HB 1017 does not try to regulate federal immigration enforcement. It focuses on our state's authority to govern zoning, land use, and occupancy and allows us to make change by establishing protections that are in our State's control. The bill's retroactive application is also crucial, to prevent federal agencies or private corporations from rushing to lock in prejudicial agreements before the law takes effect.

Based on our direct work with detained individuals and their families, we are clear: where private immigration detention centers exist, exorbitant harm to local communities follows. We urge you to support HB 1017 as an emergency measure and to affirm Maryland's commitment to public health, community safety, and dignity for all. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Montgomery County Immigrant Rights Collective