

SB 850 - SUPPORT
CORRECTIONAL SERVICES - IMMIGRATION DETENTION -
PROHIBITION (DIGNITY NOT DETENTION ACT)

Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 26, 2020

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the R.I.S.E. Coalition of Western Maryland, we urge a favorable report on SB 850. RISE stands for Resources for Immigrant Support and Empowerment. We are an immigrants' rights organization based in Frederick Maryland and have a full understanding of the harm done in communities that target residents of color, often on pretexts as transparent as "your headlights are too bright," and detain contributing immigrant community members, even for minor civil infractions, because of their immigration status.

In Frederick, we have had two separate contracts with ICE since 2008. Both have been extremely problematic--to quote the president of the county council, they're "tearing the county apart"--and have little to no transparency or oversight. One of those agreements, made unilaterally by the sheriff with ICE against the wishes of many of his deputies, and much of the community as a whole, is to house the detainees in the county's Adult Detention Center, which has been criticized for its inhumane and unconstitutional conditions. A 2013 inspection by ICE's office of detention oversight found our detention center office non-compliant with agency standards on 20 counts, including unmonitored access to legal representatives, timely provision of healthcare, interpretation services, food safety, and documentation of detainee grievances.

Sheriff Charles Jenkins' record in management of the detention center also includes detainees routinely and deliberately being subjected to cold temperatures, juveniles being illegally held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day, entrapment of immigrants brought to the center on the pretext of continuing legitimate documentation processes, and multiple in-custody suicides.

We concerned residents and taxpayers have no sure way of knowing if these issues have been addressed at all, let alone resolved. When we submit public information requests (PIAs) to the Frederick County Sheriff's Office, they usually respond that they cannot give out information about a federal program. And our outreach to our county council members, DHS, the office of the Inspector General, and our AG Brian Frosh has met with similar stonewalling. The answer--contestable (but politically expedient) under the terms of the county charter and other pertinent documents--is always "The sheriff is an independently elected official who entered into The

these contracts legally and the only way to end them is to vote him out of office.” Our detention center is a publicly funded facility, not a private prison. And yet, we still lack transparency and oversight, which makes us especially mindful of the fact that well-documented abuses in private facilities, like the ones the current Administration is promoting in Maryland and nationwide, are even more numerous and unconscionable.

Our 10-plus years’ experience living in a community where both the 287(g) and IGSA programs have been permitted to come in and take root has taught us something we hope other communities will never have to learn the hard way: that the profiling, entrapment, and detention of fellow human beings whose main goals have been for themselves and their loved ones to escape life-threatening circumstances and become contributing members of a once proudly welcoming country not only robs them of their dignity and humanity--it robs us (that is, all of us who countenance it) of our own.

For example, by discouraging our better instincts and encouraging our darkest ones. As illustrated by a sign brandished by a demonstrator at a recent rally promoted and attended by Frederick’s sheriff and his supporters--among them, white supremacists--in opposition to another rally, in celebration of the county’s immigrant community, being held at the same time a few blocks away. Captured by a Frederick News Post photographer and appearing in the paper the next day, it read, “Next time we’ll bring pitchforks and torches.”

For these and other reasons, we urge a favorable report and the passage of SB 850.

Sincerely,

The R.I.S.E. Coalition of Western Maryland.